Theology vol. 112.

AN

ESSAY

TENDING TO PROVE

THAT

Christianity

HAS

Promoted the Happineſs of Man,

as an

Intellectual, Moral and Social

BEING.

Ταυτην μονην ευρισκον φιλοσοφιαν ασφαλη τε και συμφορον.

Justin. Martyr. dial. cum Tryph. Jud.

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AN

ESSAY TENDING TO &c:

NO ſubject can be more admirably adapted to awaken the finer ſenſibilities of the ſoul, than the contemplation of man in his various capacities, relations and dependencies. In oppoſition to the ſullen dignity of Stoiciſm, the united feelings, and the according temper of mankind, plead his ſuſceptibility of poſitive happineſs and miſery.

In the firſt age of the world, the fruition of pleaſures, pure, rational and uninterrupted, was the diſcriminating prerogative of humanity. But by his tranſgreſſion, our great anceſtor renounced this prerogative. The denunciations of an offended Creator were carried into execution. Adam and his poſterity were generally abandoned to the gui-

dance of a diſordered imagination. The ſoul was warped from the chaſte bias of nature, and loſt much of its primitive excellence. Inſtead of a majeſtic and celeſtial ſimplicity, it became the frightful manſion of a perverted underſtanding. Divine influence alone could diſpel this darkneſs of the mind.

By a diſpenſation peculiarly his own, the Almighty had promiſed, "that the ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head." The coming of the Meſſiah was accordingly announced by types and prophecies, ſo characteriſtic of every feature, as to convince the rational and the unprejudiced, that events ſo wonderfully complicated and ſo beautifully cemented, beſpoke no ordinary deſigner. From a religion diſſeminated by ſupernatural means and eſtabliſhed for the moſt noble purpoſes, we are induced to look for effects of the moſt extenſive influence even on the temporal character of man.

The deſign of the preſent eſſay is to ſhew that thoſe effects have promoted human happineſs.

The immediate end of Chriſtianity, no doubt, is to prepare mankind for the enjoyment of a future ſtate; but, in the proſecution of this end, its doctrines neceſſarily produce a collateral effect on the human ſpecies, as intellectual, moral, and ſocial

cial creatures. And, ſince human happineſs conſiſts in the proper exerciſe and application of the intellectual, moral, and ſocial powers; we ſhall conſider the effect of the Chriſtian religion upon theſe reſpective powers, and endeavour to ſhew in what manner, and how far it has operated on their nature and extent.

FIRST, *On the Intellectual Powers:*

THE underſtanding is equally ſuſceptible of habits with our other faculties; the modification and eſtabliſhment of theſe habits muſt conſequently depend on the nature and quality of the objects and opinions, with which they are chiefly converſant. Strange as it may appear, men of the moſt unbounded reſearch have contended, that the limits of our intellectual capacity are contracted by the doctrines of the Chriſtian Theology. It is curious however to obſerve, what little regard is paid to fact, when the imagination is once entangled in the mazes of paradox. We ſhall, notwithſtanding, admit the truth of this arbitrary poſition, if a tendency of this kind can be ſaid to reſult, directly or indirectly from thoſe tenets, which

which acquaint us with the character and end of our being; which inculcate the juſteſt notions of God and divine things, and which ſummon us to actions the moſt laudable and benevolent.

Superſtition and enthuſiaſm are inſuperable barriers to the advancement of real knowledge. To theſe vicious habits our diſpoſitions are naturally prone. But while the mind is toſſed on this wild and tempeſtuous ocean of life, without a compaſs, without a pilot, and anxiouſly catches at every ſtraw that floats on the ſurface, the Chriſtian landmark points out an harbour of ſecurity and happineſs. In the religion of Chriſt there is no mixture of light and ſhade: no confuſion of human infirmities with divine perfections. All is ſimple, yet majeſtic; all is uniform, yet ſublime.

On the one hand it releaſes the mind from a ſervile ſubjection to the ſenſes, by ſummoning its attention to objects of the moſt tranſcendent magnitude and excellence. It expands and exalts our underſtanding, by aſſuring us, that we have a preſumptive title to immortality, and a peculiar claim to divine affection. When we reflect on our future habitation with that Being, "whom the heaven, and the heaven of heavens cannot contain," the myſterious and powerful energies of our nature operate with an intenſe and inceſſant force, to

diſpel

diſpel every grovelling idea that ſuperſtition would excite. The Chriſtian religion elevates the conceptions of the more humble and indigent, when it informs him that he is equally entitled to eternal happineſs with the rich; and by propoſing a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, it ſupplies the more dignified and affluent with a ſtronger motive to cultivate a diſpoſition, generous, ſociable and humane; and thus it ſtamps a bolder, and at the ſame time a finer feature on the general character.

On the other hand, the Chriſtian Scriptures are equally free from the phrenzy of enthuſiaſm. They diſcountenance all arrogant ideas concerning the dignity of human nature. From the tenets which they inculcate, the moſt exalted and preſumptuous imagination cannot ſhadow to itſelf the leaſt immunity, from the bounds and directions of reaſon. Our future happineſs is conditional, and the very nature of theſe conditions precludes every pretenſion of enthuſiaſm. But leſt we ſhould appear to produce aſſertion inſtead of fact, we will compare the effects of different religious perſuaſions with thoſe of Chriſtianity.

The Chriſtian theology will ſhine forth with a ſuperior luſtre in its effects on the human mind, even when contraſted with that of the Jews. Under

der the plenary inſpiration of heaven, their legiſlators and prophets have undoubtedly tranſmitted a fund of divine wiſdom, and had poſterity received their ſacred precepts with implicit faith; we ſhould have had much to admire and little to lament under the Moſaic diſpenſation. But the principles of Polytheiſm fomented the workings of a fancy naturally ſuperſtitious; and theſe principles the deſcendants of Iſrael had imbibed during their reſidence in Egypt. * To wean them from habits ſo vicious and deſtructive, and to prevent their intercourſe with the Pagan world, the Almighty promulged the moral and the ceremonial laws. Such inſtitutions, and ſo wiſely conceived, might command the veneration and enforce the obedience of a few contemplative minds. But the deſign of certain commandments and ceremonies, was utterly inconceivable to the more groſs and vulgar, the object and extent of whoſe devotion had ever been determined by the circumſtances, the ſituations, and habitudes of their lives. And though the menaces of an inſulted Deity had been executed, in ſeveral memorable inſtances; yet the gay forms and obſervances of ſuperſtition had become ſo congenial to their feelings, that if they were forcibly awaken-

* Spencer de leg. Heb. p. 627, 628, &c.

ed

ed by the thunderbolts of divine vengeance, they ſtill regretted the loſs of their pleaſing and deluſive viſion. The thickening miſt gathered into a cloud, denſe and impenetrable. A pure ſyſtem of theology was gradually veiled by the Cabbala, a ſtrange mixture of the ſubtleties of the Egyptian, the Oriental and Grecian ſchools.* The Phariſee, the Sadducee and the Eſſene exhibit the ſtatelineſs of Zeno, the liſtleſſneſs of Epicurus, and the miſery of Pythagoras. Traditions reared on traditions, ſyſtems heaped on ſyſtems, ſwelled into a pile cumberſome and confuſed. The Talmud ſtill exiſts an everlaſting monument of human folly, only ſo far valuable as it diſplays a ſtriking inſtance of the weakneſs of abandoning reaſon to follow the wild reveries of imagination.

Chriſtianity has for ever eaſed mankind from the intolerable burden of ceremonial obſervances.

In its operations on the intellectual powers, the Chriſtian religion will ſhine forth with a ſtill more ſteady and durable luſtre, when contraſted with the looſe and uncertain principles of Polytheiſm.

On the one hand, man, unenlightened by the rays of divine revelation, is ſubject to unaccountable terrors and apprehenſions ariſing from the variety and uncertainty of unknown events; and

* Moſheim, Cent. 1. Part 2. chap. 1.

unacquainted with the doctrines of a particular Providence, he feels, or thinks he feels the agency of principles apparently contrary and continually at war. He has either received from tradition, handed down from time immemorial, ſome mutilated and imperfect account of certain ſuperior intelligences; probably the fragments of divine revelation: or his mind, ever willing to foſter its own prejudices, conjures up certain imaginary phantoms, the arbitrary diſpoſers of good and evil. Perhaps too, theſe imaginary divinities were formerly beings that bore no diſtant reſemblance to himſelf; exalted to this tutelary ſtation for raſh and accidental exploits of heroiſm or defective codes of juriſprudence. In a ſtate of nature, however, man is ſurrounded with more numerous wants and paſſions; his perceptions are more acute and his feelings more lively: hence he fancies a predominating principle of evil. The creatures which he digniñes with the name of Gods, are cruel and inexorable. His means to ſecure their protection are not leſs extravagant and prepoſterous. In the votary of this weak and narrow ſuperſtition, it would be fruitleſs to look for thoſe high ideas of excellence, that Chriſtianity is ſo admirably formed to inſpire. His mind entirely engroſſed in the contemplation of objects ignoble,

melancholy

melancholy and moroſe, becomes debaſed and enervated, and tinges with a ſimilar ſhade, his moſt ordinary affections and employments.

On the other hand, the uninterrupted enjoyment of a ſeries of proſperous events, ſubjects the mind of man to a certain preſumption. He fancies himſelf the favourite of his deities. He diſdains the tedious, beggarly elements of reaſon, and the chaſte guidance of experience. His imagination becomes elevated and inflamed. To this fanatical ſpirit he blindly gives himſelf up. But as no human ſoul, from its nature and conſtruction, can ever endure the void that is left by ſo groundleſs a faith, that wide chaſm which the enthuſiaſt makes by overleaping the juſt and regular gradations of reaſon and experience, muſt neceſſarily be filled up with the efferveſcence of the moſt violent and corrupt paſſions. Their imperious dictates hurry him on, to the total ſubverſion of every eſtabliſhment, civil as well as religious, of every right human and divine.

Curioſity blends itſelf, more or leſs, with all the paſſions of man. It is hardly poſſible that the active and ſubtile principle which prevails in every enlightened mind at leaſt, ſhould acquieſce in a form of worſhip, ſo palpably groſs and abſurd as the heathen mythology. In the moſt barbarous

ſocieties, there are generally men of ſufficient reaſon and diſcernment to perceive the folly and impiety of vulgar notions of the Deity. By abſtracting from his imperfections, they arrived at what appeared to them, an idea of a perfect being. But their minds were of too active and reſtleſs a principle ever to ſettle on the exact point of truth. If we are diſguſted with the gods of the unenlightened Polytheiſt, repreſented with human paſſions and appetites, limbs and organs; we are not leſs perplexed with the more refined and exorbitant ſpeculations of the Pagan theologian. A minute inquiry into the nature and tendency of the ancient philoſophy, will be found more eſſentially neceſſary, when we conſider that its pernicious effects were not confined to the times of the ancients only. For in the middle ages, it ultimately produced innumerable ſcenes of havoc and perplexity; and even in this our enlightened age and nation, many of its fundamental opinions are embraced, by a large body of human kind, diſtinguiſhed in every intellectual attainment of the arts, the ſciences and learning.

It would be uſeleſs to enumerate the whimſical and idle fancies of Zoroaſter, his doctrine of emanations, his various orders of intelligences, and his imaginary principles of good and evil. For as the

the human ſoul experienced the agency of the one or the other, it would incline to ſuperſtition or enthuſiaſm; and we have already ſeen that neither ſuperſtition nor enthuſiaſm, are of a nature to confirm and meliorate the habits of the mind.

Philoſophy is chiefly valuable, not as it furniſhes an idle quibble or a ſilly queſtion for the ſchools, but as it ſupplies mankind with a rule of conduct. Socrates was convinced of the truth of this; he accordingly indulged himſelf leſs than any of the heathen philoſophers in the licentiouſneſs of metaphyſical inveſtigation: His errors were not ſo glaring and conſpicuous; his precepts were rather practical than ſpeculative. But notwithſtanding the purity of his life and the ſublimity of his morality; the infamous conduct of the Athenians, in putting to death this great and venerable man, would convince the moſt ſceptical, that doctrines which could ſupply the multitude with motives merely temporal (for Socrates himſelf doubted the exiſtence of a future ſtate) will never bear them up againſt the force of paſſion and the temptation of preſent advantage.

Fraught with the ſubtleties of the Pythagorean, and probably with the ſublime notions of the Hebrew ſchool, Plato blended many ſpeculative opinions with the ſimple precepts of Socrates.

He

He (with ſeveral of the ancient philoſophers) laboured under a capital error, in endeavouring to prove the eternity and immutability of the material world, by aſſuming it as an univerſal axiom, that from nothing, nothing can proceed, and that nothing which exiſts can be annihilated. Such a ſentiment is highly derogatory from that power, which the ſacred ſcriptures teach us to expect in the Governor of the univerſe. This philoſopher exalts man infinitely above the character and nature of his being, unites him with certain imaginary divine principles, and with Zoroaſter, conducts him, through various orders of emanation and forms of intelligence, to the ſupreme deity, the knowledge of whom, ſays he,* it is no leſs difficult to attain, than dangerous and impious to publiſh.

> As imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.

Theſe creatures of his fancy, he repreſents as the firſt principles of wiſdom. But it is happy for mankind, that the foundations of true wiſdom, reſt on ſurer grounds than the viſionary ſpeculations of Plato.

* Tim. Ser. T. 3, p. 28.

Nothing

Nothing can be more ſimple and perſpicuous than the origin of evil, as deſcribed in the ſacred volume. How different from that blind and refractory force of matter, the cauſe of all the imperfections and diſorders of creation, which riſes ſuperior to the Deity himſelf, counteracts his moſt benevolent purpoſes, and makes him the mere tool of an inert unanimated ſubſtance? How totally different from that chain of neceſſity, from that eternal, irreſiſtible, immutable ſeries of cauſes and effects.

The doctrine of a future ſtate is the moſt important and diſtinguiſhed feature of Chriſtianity. Among innumerable other motives to virtuous action, this is the moſt powerful. The proſpect which eternal happineſs opens to our view,

Seems another morn
Risen on mid-noon.

And while infinite wiſdom has drawn a veil over an object ſo inconceivably grand and excellent,

Hope elevates, and joy
Brightens our creſt.

We ardently deſire to poſſeſs that bleſſing, the extent of which no eye can ſee, no heart conceive, and which no tongue can adequately tell. We are aſſured however, that it will far exceed our moſt ſanguine expectations, and anſwer our moſt boundleſs wiſhes.

What

What idea then are we to form of that animating principle of action, which, at the expiration of the Great Year, will reduce every thing to its ancient ſtate? Of that eternal round, when the mind is to re-act all its follies and vices and deformities? When we ſhall be recalled to life, not by the appointment of a wiſe and merciful God, but by the irreſiſtible law of fate; not for the enjoyment of perfect felicity, but to a ſtate that is replete with diſaſter, infirmity and error? The greater part of mankind certainly drink much deeper of the cup of miſery than of happineſs; hence the ideas, which theſe doctrines hold up to their view are not of a nature to adminiſter to their comfort.

From the univerſality of its nature, and the indelicacy of its choice, no paſſion is ſuſceptible of a greater variety of modifications than that of vanity. When gratified, it branches out into arrogance and an affectation of ſingularity; when diſappointed, and it generally is diſappointed, it degenerates into the oppoſite extreme of envy, miſanthropy and brutality of character. This intolerant and unſociable diſpoſition of mind has given birth to innumerable ſects. To ſome ſuch ſource as this we may trace the origin of the Cynics, Stoics, Pythagoreans, Epicureans, and in a ſtill later period

period the Pyrrhoniſts. The tenets of theſe ſects, extravagant and prepoſterous in the extreme, are little ſuited to nouriſh this our poor and ſhivering nature; they cannot but cloſe the ſofter avenues of the ſoul, and deſtroy all its finer ſenſibilities.

If, with that ſympathetic and affecting ſcene, the lamentation of our Saviour, when he anticipated the calamities, which were to befal the Jewiſh nation, we contraſt that parade of Stoical fortitude, which commands its wiſe men, not only to be free from all ſenſe of pleaſure, but void of all paſſions and emotions, and capable of indifference in the midſt of torment; how humane, natural and graceful the one! How affected, diſtorted and diſguſting the other! Should either of theſe leſſons ever become the grand precedents, for the conduct of mankind, their reſpective effects would be too obvious to need a comment.

Some of the Grecian Philoſophers admitted that the Deity might poſſibly exiſt; but, inſtead of exhibiting his divine wiſdom in its faireſt form, they obſcured, what to their minds would have been ſufficiently unintelligible, all his attributes with jargon and confuſion. It is extremely difficult to conceive the idea, which an ancient philoſopher (Zeno of Elea) could attach to a Being, homogeneous and ſpherical; neither finite nor

infinite; neither quieſcent nor moveable. But it admits of no difficulty at all to conceive what every rational creature ought to think of ſuch a philoſopher, and his nugatory ideas.

The management of the world, exclaims the Epicurean, and of its petty concerns, is infinitely beneath the dignity of a God, ſo ſupremely exalted above all ſublunary things. Can we imagine ſo contemptible an animal as man to be endowed with immortality? Certainly not. Let us therefore follow the agreeable propenſities of our nature, and yield to the faſcinating allurements of ſenſual pleaſure.

In a word, many of the tenets of theſe philoſophers are exactly of a nature, to qualify man for the oppoſite extremes, of a charnel-houſe, or a brothel.

The obvious tendency of theſe daring, ſceptical and impious ſpeculations is, and always has been to eſtrange the underſtanding from the ſober dictates of common ſenſe, to ſeduce the judgment into a raſh and ſtubborn dogmatiſm, to invalidate every principle of human knowledge, to deſtroy every criterion of truth, and to conſume the very vitals of all ſcience, human and divine.

The tenets of the Grecian philoſophy were gradually embraced by the Romans. The deadly venom infuſed itſelf into a maſs more unwieldy and

and cumberſome : its noxious ingredients darting with aſtoniſhing rapidity through the whole frame, grew with its growth and ſtrengthened with its ſtrength.

So vague and deplorable were the religious opinions of mankind at the coming of the promiſed Meſſiah. The Jews had adopted a myſtical interpretation of their law, which converted its plain meaning into a confuſed heap of idle fancies. The heathen world was devoted to the looſe, debaſing, uncertain principles of Polytheiſm ; or to the poiſonous tenets of a ſceptical and atheiſtical philoſophy.

The Son of God did not chooſe to commit the propagation of ſo pure a religion to the infatuated and bewildered imagination of the conceited philoſopher. He foreſaw that its progreſs would be attributed to human and natural cauſes. He effectually cut off every objection that could poſſibly ariſe from this ſource. And indeed Chriſtianity was little, if at all, indebted to the aſſiſtance of the learned. He was perſuaded that the great truths, that were to acquaint the human ſpecies with the purpoſes of divine wiſdom, would more powerfully proceed from the ignorant and humble fiſherman. The actual conſequences bore not the leaſt ſhadow of proportion to the apparent means. There were innumerable converts to the Chriſtian cauſe, from a people the moſt bigoted and intol-

ſerant on the face of the earth. One inſtance however among many, is deſerving of particular notice and ſelection. In the great Apoſtle of the Gentiles, we behold a vigorous mind labouring under the influence of error and fanaticiſm. The fury of ſuperſtitious zeal had extinguiſhed the tendereſt ſentiments of nature. But Chriſtianity was capable of producing a very viſible change, even on his external conduct. His contracted, illiberal and bigoted notions had frozen the genial current of his ſoul. But the mildneſs of this new religion laid open every avenue, and made his boſom feelingly alive to the calls of humanity.

But theſe effects were by no means confined to the Jewiſh nation alone. From the teſtimonies of ſacred writ, and from the confeſſions of declared enemies to the cauſe, its influence was ſtill more widely diffuſed over the Gentile world. The promulgation of the Goſpel among the Gentiles, is the moſt remarkable for its ſubverſion of their favourite idolatry, the rites of which were blended and incorporated with all the amuſements of ſociety; with almoſt every circumſtance of pleaſure and of buſineſs, of public and of private life. This permanent converſion of the Gentiles will appear in a more miraculous point of view, if we conſider the extreme verſatility of groſs and vulgar minds. Add to this circumſtance, that the diver-

ſified

ſified worſhip of the ancients, poſſeſſed a correſpondent capacity of accommodating itſelf to this verſatility of diſpoſition. The magnificence of their temples; the ſuperb ornaments of their prieſts and victims; the exquiſite workmanſhip of their ſtatues; the beauty and gracefulneſs of the attendant youths of both ſexes; the ſplendour and pomp of their ceremonies; the feaſts, the perfumes, the dances, the illuminations; and above all, the harmony and melody of their ſongs and muſic *: Every thing of this deſcription operates by a kind of faſcination on the ſenſes, and by binding the ſoul to the contemplation of ſenſible objects ſolely, has an ultimate tendency to contract and enervate its faculties. Hence the Pagan worſhip is badly adapted to fill up thoſe tedious and anxious hours, thoſe aching voids, which every man is formed to feel more or leſs from his circumſtances and ſituations. There is ſurely then no one ſo depraved, ſo completely diveſted of every humane and generous feeling, as openly to ſtand forward the advocate for the groſs and debaſing principles of Polytheiſm. Again—

Our admiration will be farther increaſed, when we reflect that theſe converts abandoned ſuch captivating allurements, in order to embrace a religi-

* Hey's Lect. Theol. B. 1. ch. 18. S. 6.

on

on which laboured under every poſſible diſadvantage. On the one ſide exiſted the prejudices, and the power of their enemies, and the actual and utmoſt exertion of this power : on the other ſide, the Chriſtians practiſed that kind of virtue which was in little eſtimation in the world ; purity, ſimplicity, benevolence, charity, mildneſs of manners ; fortitude and heroiſm in priſon, at the ſtake, upon the croſs. It muſt be confeſſed then, that the voice of Chriſtianity had charms which no force, no reaſoning could diſpel. Its awakening influence was experienced by millions and millions of our ſpecies, in every variety of political power, and in every modification of manners ; under climates the moſt oppoſite and ſkies the moſt ungenial. By the perſuaſive conviction of its eloquence, the Indian, the Perſian, the Goth, firmly believed the immortality of the ſoul and a future ſtate of recompence.* By the virtues which it inculcates with that peculiar energy and ſimplicity of diction ; with that rude and negligent grandeur of thought ; and by the precepts which it delivers in a manner equally free from all the littleneſs of art and the affectation of ornament, the fierceneſs of the Thracian was ſoftened, and the barbarity of the Scythian humanized.†

* Paley's Evid. V. 2. 241. † Paley's Evid. V. 2. 242.

After

After all, it will be eaſy for ſophiſtry to invent new forms of objection, while the ſceptic, the infidel and the libertine will be ever ready to liſten to arguments ſo congenial to their wiſhes. The conceited philoſopher may inſinuate with a malignant ſneer, that the Chriſtian religion was the primary cauſe of the intellectual darkneſs of the middle ages: he may deſcribe in ſpecious terms, the lamentable conſequences of a pernicious ſuperſtition, or the poiſonous rancour of theological hatred. The artful hiſtorian may paint in the moſt ſtriking colours, the arbitrary decrees of councils and of popes; the vices of eccleſiaſtics, and the horrors of religious wars; the ſullen gloomineſs of the recluſe, and the wanton penance of the aſcetic. But when they have laviſhed all their underſtanding and ingenuity upon the ſubject, they have merely been detailing the paſſions and errors of men, weak and fallible as themſelves. The candid and impartial inquirer will trace theſe enormities to a different ſource. He will ſee that the Chriſtian, no more than any other diſpenſation, is to be judged of by its perverſion, but by its genuine tendency. He will be at a loſs to account for the corruptions of thoſe times, the moſt calamitous and afflictive to mankind, recorded in the annals of hiſtory, from an inſtitution which diſcountenances every vice,

vice, ſpeculative and practical. From the nature of things he will ſee that it is morally impoſſible.

Chriſtianity however has been adduced as a primary cauſe of the intellectual darkneſs of the middle ages. But would its enemies lay their hearts open to conviction, would they conſult their reaſon rather than their paſſions, would they leave the determination of the cauſe to the cool deciſion of the underſtanding; their candour and judgment might ſuggeſt ſome ſuch argument as the following. An argument that holds equally in the moral as in the natural world, and which, if ſtrictly attended to, would be a means of ſettling many diſputes that have ariſen concerning the Chriſtian faith. When we infer any particular effect from a cauſe, the nature and qualities of which cauſe have been rigorouſly aſcertained and accurately defined, it is our duty to conſider, whether there be a probability or even ſo much as a poſſibility, that the effect in queſtion can proceed from this cauſe. If the natures of the cauſe and of the effect, which we examine, be in themſelves either different, contrary or impoſſible, we are no longer at liberty to conſider that cauſe as producing that particular effect. Some ſuch argument as this then, will perhaps aſſiſt us in our reaſonings, and enable us to ſee, that the nature of the Chriſtian religion, and the nature of the effects

that

that have been aſcribed to it, are in themſelves ſo repugnant, as never to be a conſequence, one of the other.

It ſeems reaſonable therefore, that we produce an adequate and real cauſe, for that long night of intellectual darkneſs. And here the page of hiſtory furniſhes us with three events, which, had there been no Chriſtian religion, would have been more than amply adequate for the worſt effects of thoſe worſt of times; I mean the ſubverſion of the Roman empire; the introduction of the more fanciful and obſcure parts of the ancient philoſophy, into the ſcholaſtic diſputations, and the appearance of Mahomet in the Eaſt.

First. The fall of the Roman empire was the greateſt event, that had ever engaged the attention of man, whether we conſider it in its more immediate or more diſtant conſequences. But the ſevereſt analogy informs us, that the miſeries ſuſtained by the human ſpecies, during that period, were not proportionably greater, than the miſeries that have attended the ſubverſion of all great empires. If we moreover reflect that the happineſs, cauſed by the Chriſtian religion, is of a ſilent and peaceable nature; produced too without any extraordinary effort, and in the natural and general order of events; that this religion has chiefly ope-

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rated on that deſcription of men, with whom hiſtory is the leaſt acquainted : if we again reflect upon the nature of ſubjects which form the annals of public hiſtory, that theſe ſubjects have ultimately ariſen from the froth and ebulition of ſome corrupt paſſion ; that hiſtory is ſcarce any thing but a continued regiſter of the follies and vices of perſons who move in a more elevated ſphere ; we ſhall have reaſon to preſume that the calamities of thoſe periods were proportionably leſs than is generally imagined.

There is one circumſtance however worthy of particular mention. A circumſtance that reflects the higheſt honour on the ſpirit of Chriſtianity. A circumſtance that will enhance the value of our religion with every lover of the arts and ſciences. I ſcarcely need mention, that I allude to the preſervation of ancient literature.* A ſenſe of gratitude will compel every manly mind at leaſt, to acknowledge, that, during the ſubverſion of the Roman empire, Chriſtianity was the only pillar, againſt which literature could lean. Had it not been for the ſupport of this pillar, ſhattered as it was by the aſſaults of enemies, and deformed by its well-meaning, but injudicious friends, the human intellect would have been cruſhed ; the no-

* Bacon's Advan. of Lear. B. 1.

bleſt

bleſt efforts of genius would have vaniſhed, like the baſeleſs fabric of a viſion, and not have left a wreck behind.

Second. During theſe periods, the more fanciful and obſcure parts of the ancient philoſophy, became incorporated with the Chriſtian faith, and detracted much from its ancient purity and ſimplicity. For the paths of error are various and infinite, and unleſs the mind be directed by divine truth, it is apt to yield to the guidance of a diſordered imagination. The primitive Chriſtians had executed their miſſion, with plainneſs and fidelity; unaſſiſted by rhetorical embelliſhments or philoſophical refinements. Several Gentiles eminently verſed in the oriental philoſophy had become converts to the Chriſtian cauſe. With the faith of Chriſt they blended many ſubtle but obſcure tenets, which finally terminated in the hereſies and abſurdities of the Gnoſtics.* From the Gnoſtics imperceptibly aroſe the Baſilidians, the Valentinians, the Marcionites, and, in a later period, the Manichæans. § The opinions of theſe ſects partake much of the ſame nature with the fanciful opinions of the oriental philoſophers, and of Zoroaſter in particular, differently

* Moſheim. Cent. 1. Part 2. Chap. 5.

§ Gibbon, Chap, 15.

 modified

modified indeed, and mingled with a ſmattering of the ſublime notions of the Chriſtian religion. Many of the fathers moreover, were advocates for different ſects of the Grecian philoſophy. They introduced into their ſyſtem of faith, the language and ſentiments of Plato, which appeared to have the neareſt affinity to the Chriſtian theology. † From the Peripatetic ſchool, they borrowed weapons to attack the numerous hereſies which had crept into their church. Hence, from their injudicious mixture of the dogmas of Pagan philoſophy with the doctrines of Chriſtianity, aroſe the ſcholaſtic and myſtic theology: the former began to exiſt when the dialectics and ethics of Ariſtotle were introduced into the church ‡; the latter took its riſe from the fanatical and enthuſiaſtic principles of the Alexandrian Eclectic philoſophy.

Under ſo many and ſuch a variety of depreſſing circumſtances, the mind could hardly retain its activity and vigour. All the ſteady, all the generous and noble principles that Chriſtianity is qualified to inſpire, were diſſipated, degraded or extinguiſhed. Every ſentiment of decency, of elegance, of manlineſs, was almoſt entirely obliterated. The ſoul was nurſed in error, and by becoming ſubject to the iron yoke of this philoſophy,

† Moſheim, Cent. 3, Part 2. Chap. 3.

‡ Moſheim. Cent. 5. Part 2. Chap. 1. Sec. 6.

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loſt not only the habit, but even the capacity of deciding for itſelf. An opportunity ſo deſireable and inviting would ſcarcely be overlooked by unprincipled men, who never want an inſtrument to promote their ambitious views. The magician, the oracle and the augur could, in the earlier ages of the world, advance the intereſts of a favourite warrior, The influence of magic had for a long time been generally doubted ; and ſince the appearance of Chriſtianity, the oracle was ſilenced. To men therefore who were hardened and graduated in wickedneſs, who were reſolved at all events to conſult their own intereſts, the perverted meaning of the ſacred Scriptures, would be equally ſubſervient, as the moſt degrading ſuperſtition. The annals of ſeveral centuries, accordingly, teem with legendary tales, viſionary cruſades and papal indulgencies.

Third. The third event was the appearance of Mahomet in the Eaſt. If we conſider the magnitude of this event, the time of its commencement, its co-operation with other cauſes, equally deſolating and deſtructive, we ſhall ceaſe to wonder at the almoſt univerſal ſubjugation of the intellectual powers of man. In order to keep his infatuated followers as ignorant as himſelf and to cut off every ſource of contradiction, Mahomet iſſued an edict, which made the ſtudy of the liberal

arts

arts and ſciences, a capital offence. A blind reverence for the Koran, the excellencies of which were chiefly pilfered from the ſacred writings, long ſuperſeded every philoſophical and literary purſuit; whatever was contrary to its dogmas was condemned as falſe and erroneous. The hiſtorian may eaſily exhauſt the ſtores of rhetoric and poetry, in relating the errors and wretchedneſs of man under the ſuperſtition and deſpotiſm which pervade the Turkiſh empire, "where the fineſt countries in the moſt genial climates in the world are waſted by peace, more than any other countries have been worried by war, where arts are unknown, where manufactures languiſh, where ſcience is extinguiſhed, where agriculture decays; where the human race itſelf melts away and periſhes under the eye of the obſerver." But to deſcribe the wanton and unneceſſary havoc, committed in the deſtruction of the Alexandrian library,*

* Mr. Gibbon denies the authenticity of this fact. But his negative argument can weigh little againſt the poſitive evidence of ſo reſpectable a writer as Abulpharagius; eſpecially if we conſider that Mr. Gibbon has placed the Mahometan Superſtition in the moſt favourable light. One would imagine that his partiality for Mahometaniſm aroſe from his ſtrong diſlike to Chriſtianity, which he indeed hates ſo cordially that he might ſeem to revenge ſome injury. *See Porſon's Let. to Travis, Introd.*

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the effects of indulging the moſt unbounded deſires, of oppreſſive pilgrimages and of rituals, if poſſible ſtill more oppreſſive, are taſks, too ponderous, too laborious for his feeble pencil.

The ſpirit of the Chriſtian religion is exactly the reverſe both in its nature and conſequences. There runs through its whole tenour, that chaſtity and delicacy of thought, which the moſt prurient fancy alone can pervert; that manlineſs and dignity of language, which gives a peculiar force to its moſt ordinary precepts. No ſanctions, which it holds forth, were ever proſtituted to pander for the polluted imagination; were ever deſigned to countenance the favourite paſſions and deep-rooted prejudices of any deſcription of men. So far from encouraging that fierceneſs, that brutality of character, that uncharitable and forbidding diſpoſition of mind, that illiberal, contracted notion concerning literature in general, ſo peculiar to the Mahometans in particular; the moſt general and diſcriminating feature of Chriſtian countries is that courteouſneſs and affability of manners, which has ſubdued the fierceneſs of pride and melted into each other, the different gradations and too artificial diſtinctions of ſociety, that union of elegance with learning, of good ſenſe with manly reaſoning, which flouriſhes among them, and indeed among them ſolely.* The

* It is a well-known fact that learning was introduced

The rage for the dialectical and metaphyſical parts of the ancient philoſophy, ſeems to have increaſed from the twelfth century to the reformation. For inſtead of uniting their endeavours to enlighten mankind, the ſcholaſtic theologians were themſelves benighted in metaphyſical darkneſs. It is eaſier to conceive than to deſcribe the ſerious or ridiculous effects, produced by this monſtrous medley of philoſophy on the manners of that age. The writings of the Stagyrite, of themſelves ſufficiently obſcure, were read in verſions notoriouſly mutilated and imperfect, and to make "confuſion worſe confounded," the ideas of Ariſtotle were blended with the ignorant commentaries of Averroes, his moſt enthuſiaſtic admirer. Theſe circumſtances taken into conſideration, we are willing to admit the accounts of this period in their utmoſt latitude. We are ready to grant that theſe polemics conducted their diſputes with vehemence and acrimony; that there was an open and declared war between Nominaliſts, Realiſts, Verbaliſts, Formaliſts, Thomiſts, Scotiſts, and Occamites; that a very inferior claim to excellence in the ſcholaſtic art, was an infallible recommendation to the invidious titles of Moſt Profound,

among the Saracens, by Meſſue and Honain, two chriſtian phyſicians, under the caliphate of Al-Mammon.

Moſt

Moſt Subtle, Moſt Reſolute, Moſt Angelic, Moſt Seraphic Doctor; and even to the ſtill more invidious and lucrative offices of Profeſſors, Abbots, Biſhops, Cardinals and Pontiffs. In admitting accounts of this kind, we admit nothing to the prejudice of the genuine tendency of Chriſtianity. From theſe very premiſes, we are led to conclude, that no leſs an object than the Chriſtian theology could have kept alive the ſpirit of inquiry, during ſuch times of turbulence and rapine. And though theſe religious diſputes abſorbed the whole attention of mankind, yet they paved the way for that patient inveſtigation and bold inquiry, which diſtinguiſh the productions of ſucceeding ages; they were a means of calling forth that penetration, which no depth could elude, that comprehenſion of genius for which no object was too large, thoſe riches and powers of mind, which immortalize the illuſtrious labours of Eraſmus and Bacon.

From the numerous objections that have been urged againſt the Chriſtian diſpenſation, as encouraging a monaſtic life, one would be apt to imagine, that theſe fanatical notions were peculiar to Chriſtianity. To miſtaken notions of piety, many of its profeſſors undoubtedly ſacrificed a variety of ſocial enjoyments. They imagined that

they approached nearer the perfections of the Deity, by living ſequeſtered from men and manners. But to object againſt the monaſtic life, as a ſcheme peculiar to the perverſion of the Chriſtian religion alone, would be groundleſs and unjuſt; for the ſyſtems of Pythagoras and Plato, of Apollonius Tyanæus, Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus, labour under exactly the ſame inconvenience. Their errors were ſimilar and aroſe from a ſimilar ſource, changing indeed in their appearance, with the fluctuating and infinitely varying ſtate of human affairs. The recluſe buried in the gloom of a cloiſter may be thought a ſpectacle horrible and diſguſting by him, who has formed his opinion of the manners and uſages of antiquity, from the modern economy of the world, who has been habituated to judge of particular cuſtoms by abſtracting them from the circumſtances and relations in which they prevailed. But a ſlight acquaintance with the fanatical ideas of thoſe ages, will induce us to palliate an error of this kind; more eſpecially if we reflect, that we are indebted to the monk for the preſervation of ancient learning.

The time of deliverance however was faſt approaching. Smitten with the "mace petrific, cold and dry" of a falſe and unfeeling philoſophy, the mind was kept in ſtrict durance, till the friendly

friendly geniuſes of Luther and Melancthon diſpelled the magic charm. No ſooner had theſe men applied themſelves to the correction of religious errors, and endeavoured to free mankind from the yoke of eccleſiaſtical domination, than religion began to lift up her head and breathe a purer air.* The Reformation indeed can never be forgotten; it has been the moſt ſplendid and auſpicious change recorded in the annals of hiſtory. No event was ever attended with more beneficial conſequences in every department of private and public life, in the ſentiments of the rich and the habitudes of the poor. At that glorious era, the human mind burſt aſunder the fetters of bigotry and ſuperſtition, and roſe refulgent and majeſtic from ruin and depreſſion. Since that period, it has laid all nature under tribute, and encompaſſed with giant ſtrides every field of ſcience, that could invigorate and cultivate its powers, and every path of art, that could adorn and enlarge its habits. The intellectual faculties were become a maſs, putrid and inanimate; but the electric ſpark ſhot with adequate effect through every nerve; the palſied organs reſumed new vigour and elaſticity, and ſince the Reformation, the whole machine has moved with more ſpirit and ſtability.

* Moſheim, Cent. 16. paſſim.

SECONDLY.

SECONDLY. *On the Moral Powers.*

The welfare of ſociety is more intimately connected with the moral than with the intellectual habits of its individuals. Speculative principles may engroſs the attention of a few contemplative minds, without materially affecting the happineſs of the human race. But the utmoſt precaution is neceſſary in admitting thoſe practical principles, which are qualified to cement or diſſolve the moral elements of the world. Religious opinions indeed operate on the intellectual powers, in a more diſtant and indirect manner; but they alter the very conſtitution of the moral powers *; the effect of courſe is of greater importance, and more univerſal concernment. The nature of Chriſtianity is ſuch as imperiouſly to demand an unreſtricted aſſent and an implicit obedience to its dictates. It aſſumes an authority ſo abſolute as to ſuperſede every law of our nature, and ſo deciſive as to mould our opinions, inclinations and actions to the rules it preſcribes.

The ethical ſyſtems of Pagans are principally deduced from the light of nature †; or are the

* White's Sermons, IX.

† It muſt be confeſſed that a great part of the law moral is of that perfection, whereunto the light of nature cannot conjoint

conjoint effects of prejudice, education, vanity and ignorance. The Chriſtian ſyſtem has ſuperadded certain poſitive precepts, enforced by preternatural means and holding forth a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, as a motive to action, ſo powerful as to enter into the very eſſence of moral obligation. The inquiry then becomes eaſy and obvious. We are merely to conſider, which is capable of guiding us, with greater certainty and ſuperior ſanctions, to conſult our own happineſs and the happineſs of ſociety; an inſtitution which immediately declares the will and true worſhip of an All-wiſe God, exactly adapted too for man in his moral capacity, and which raiſes the ſtandard of ethics above what any other ſcheme can pretend to; or an inſtitution which

aſpire: how than is it, that man is ſaid to have by the light and law of nature, ſome notions and conceits of virtue and vice, juſtice and wrong, good and evil? Thus, becauſe the light of nature is uſed in two ſeveral ſenſes; the one, that which ſpringeth from reaſon, ſenſe, induction, argument according to the laws of heaven and earth; the other that which is imprinted upon the ſpirit of man by an inward inſtinct, according to the law of conſcience, which is a ſparkle of the purity of his firſt eſtate: in which latter ſenſe only he is participant of ſome light and diſcerning touching the perfection of the moral law: but how? Sufficient to check the vice, but not to inform the duty. So then the doctrine of religion, as well moral as myſtical, is not to be attained, but by inſpiration and revelation from God. *Bacon's Adv. of Learn. B. 2.*

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the wiſeſt and moſt infallible of men mediately deduce from principles the moſt fixed, that this variable world can afford.

In the infancy of ſociety man is preſſed with numerous wants and inconveniences. Self-love is the ruling paſſion. If abandoned to himſelf, he is unwilling or unable to inveſtigate the tendency of his actions by the cold deductions of reaſon; he cannot poſſeſs the means of that experience, of that collected wiſdom and obſervation, which diſtinguiſhes more civilized ages. He is guided by the impulſe of vague, capricious and enthuſiaſtic feelings. He can have made no progreſs in the venerable ſcience of juriſprudence; of courſe he has acquired no ſtandard to which he may refer the infinite variety of his concerns; he knows of no model to which he can aſſimilate his diverſified and continually diverſifying actions. If, conſcious of his own weakneſs, he ſubmits his conduct to the direction of another, that other is generally a cunning and politic impoſtor, who pretends to arrive at the will of his Gods by certain ſupernatural and ominous appearances. It is eaſy to foreſee the conſequences of a ſyſtem which wears error or impoſture on the very face of it. Hence among a barbarous and ſuperſtitious people, it is in vain to look for any, even tolerable principles of ethics: And while we are preſented with the intrigues

intrigues of a Jupiter, the ravages of a Mars, the debaucheries of a Bacchus; we cannot but perceive a ſimilar depravity of character, in their reſpective votaries.

When ſociety begins to aſſume a more regular form, more rational ſyſtems of ethics may naturally be expected. But even in ſocieties the moſt cultivated, the greater part of the people are too forcibly hurried on by the clamorous calls and intereſted views of the preſent moment to inquire into the expediency, or general conſequence of their actions, from what is commonly called the light of nature. Now the light of nature or the inquiry which we inſtitute into the tendency of a particular action, to promote or diminiſh the general happineſs, muſt neceſſarily, from its intricacy, be open to the underſtandings of comparatively few. Beſides the light of nature preſuppoſes a knowledge, perfect or imperfect, of the will and benevolence of the Deity. It implies that the nearer our actions are in uniſon with the divine will, the more likely we are to promote the public welfare. And though the works of the Creator ſhew forth his omnipotency and wiſdom, yet they are a very imperfect declaration of his will and deſigns with reſpect to man. The uncertainty and obſcurity, with which the light of

nature

nature is involved, has in fact been the ſource of almoſt all the involuntary errors, into which moraliſts have fallen. Again—This uncertainty and obſcurity, by not poſſeſſing ſufficient force to communicate a right bias to the inclination, leaves the mind almoſt perfectly at liberty, to deduce conſequences the moſt abſurd and pernicious that can be imagined. This liberty, this want of more convincing evidence has given riſe to many daring and impious ſpeculations, and has in reality been the ſource of a vaſt number of voluntary and unneceſſary errors. Not to mention that the wiſeſt of men in ſpeculation are often the greateſt fools in practice, and it is of practice we are now ſpeaking. Not to mention the falſe and deluſive appearances continually impoſed on us by the general nature of the mind; the infinite errors and vain opinions, which our own complexions miniſter to us; that every ſpectator having a different horizon, muſt behold different objects and views; and though the difference when ſimply and ſingly conſidered, be nearly imperceptible, yet the moſt wonderful and ſerious things are frequently accompliſhed by apparently the moſt ridiculous, abſurd and trifling events. In the moral world, however, in a great ſcheme of moral government, we allow no event to be either ridiculous.

lous, abſurd or trifling. For it is impoſſible to aſcertain how much an overt act of irregularity diſorders the conſtitution, how much the miſplacing of a feature, unſettles the adjuſtments and deſtroys the beauty of the canvaſs.

The moſt perfect, the ſublimeſt and perhaps the moſt valuable ſyſtem of ethics, ever deduced by reaſon from the light of nature, was that of Socrates. It did not however produce the ſlighteſt revolution in the manners and public opinions of the Athenians. And if the Socratic morality was barely negative in its effects; we may reaſonably expect conſequences the moſt pernicious, when we are told, that the wiſe Plato recommended a community of women, in order to give reaſon an entire control over paſſion; that the grave Solon, the pride of Grecian legiſlation, prohibited pederaſty but to ſlaves, and encouraged and authorized by law, that execrable practice, the expoſure of children; that the ſage Ariſtotle laid it down as a maxim, that barbarians were born to be ſlaves. Inſtead of adapting their precepts to the human capacity, one ſect inverted the eſtabliſhed and eternal order of things, and ſtruck out a rule of conduct in direct oppoſition to the united feelings and the collected experience of mankind. From falſe notions of God, nature and man, the piety

which another ſect inculcates, is nothing but a tame ſubmiſſion to irreſiſtible fate. The ſelf-command which a third ſect enjoins annihilates the beſt affections of the ſoul. It would be difficult to find a greater, in the whole circle of paradoxes, than that which preaches up the doctrine of accountability to a creature, who, when he is ſuppoſed to be continually acted upon by a ſuperior force, neceſſarily becomes a mere piece of mechaniſm. It would be impoſſible to meet with a more palpable abſurdity than that, which maintains that all good actions are equally virtuous, and all bad actions equally vicious; that we are to ſeek virtue for her own ſake, and at the ſame time to be free from every ſenſation of pleaſure and pain.

The philoſopher may pride himſelf upon inveſtigating and conſtructing new theories of morality, but from the mere light of nature, he can never infer the all-wiſe deſigns and the perfect attributes of the Deity; his univerſal benevolence, his omnipotence, and the doctrine of a particular providence. Were the volume of the univerſe the only tranſcript of his mind, reaſon itſelf muſt confeſs that ſuch a guide would be by no means perfect or infallible. The Deiſt, when rolling in the ſplendor of affluence, may paint nature in her happieſt attitudes; he may deſcribe the harmony of the

the planets, the order of intelligences and the beauty of vegetation ; when driven by his vices from the pleaſing endearments of ſocial life, he may feel, or he may pretend to feel, a kind of contempt for this " punctual ſpot " and its tranſitory enjoyments. But let him ſuſpend his judgment till he has reverſed the picture and examined the apparent partiality of Providence in the diſtribution of human bleſſings. Let him aſk the fierce, unpoliſhed tenant of the northern regions, what he has experienced of the beneficent hand of Providence, compared with the mild, voluptuous inhabitant of more fertile and luxuriant countries. Let him then view the vaſt deſerts of Africa, inceſſantly ſcorched by the burning ſun, or the villages of the ſuffering Indian enveloped in whirlwinds and hurricanes. But, above all, let him contemplate the ſtructure of his own mind ; the turbulence and diſquietude of paſſion and of ſenſe, and the diſagreeable and dangerous habits, which he unavoidably acquires from ſurrounding objects. Let him impartially and carefully contemplate theſe ſcenes, and the pride of his philoſophy will ſhrink into obſcurity and inſignificance.

From ſuch conſiderations then, we are naturally induced to conclude, that a perfect, omniſcient Being, would leave to a creature ſo liable to

error as man, ſome teſtimony of his good-will and pleaſure, more infallible than the volume of nature; ſome principles written in a more legible and indelible character, which would give a more favourable bias to vicious habits, and confirm thoſe habits that have been auſpiciouſly formed. The principles of morality as delivered in the Chriſtian Scriptures meet our moſt ardent wiſhes.

> Without more train
> Accompanied, than with his own complete
> Perfections,

the deliverer of theſe precepts excites our reſpect and reverence and admiration and aſtoniſhment. The character of the Meſſiah is ſublime, ſimple, uniform. It appears ſingular indeed, becauſe it is that ſpecies of character which mankind leaſt expected and which they had been accuſtomed to deſpiſe. The hero of the contemplative and enraptured poet had hitherto been arrayed in qualities tending rather to cauſe terror than to attract regard. The excellencies which were ſuppoſed to concentrate in him, were frequently deſtructive, ſeldom beneficial. In the Meſſiah, we meet with all that is lovely in humility, gentleneſs, benevolence, charity. His every attribute, his every action had for its end the promotion of human happineſs. One would be apt to imagine that this peculiarity of character alone would have been

productive of the deſired effect. But the Saviour of mankind was thoroughly acquainted with the violence of human paſſions. He knew that the principle of evil had acquired ſo complete an aſcendency in our nature as to prevent us from attending to the general and remote conſequences of our actions. He ſaw that this capital defect, that this great inconvenience muſt be obviated. He acted accordingly in accompliſhing the end of his miſſion, the truth of which was atteſted by a ſucceſſion of the moſt ſtriking and ſplendidly benevolent miracles. His prerogative was extended over the will of man; we are to obey his law, though ſuch obedience may be attended with reluctance on our part; and experience can inform us, that in a great ſcheme of moral government, this partial coercion of the will is neither impoſed by our Saviour, nor ſubmitted to by his followers in vain.

Since mankind act more from habit than reflection, it ſeems neceſſary that a religion, which muſt determine the opinions and conduct of the human ſpecies, ſhould hold forth precepts the pureſt and moſt unexceptionable. We accordingly find, that the rules of conduct it preſcribes, are infallible, reaſonable, univerſal; and this univerſal applicability is one diſcriminating excellence

of

of the Chriſtian morality. Its virtues are in different degrees practicable under every form of government and in every ſtate of ſociety ; they are capable of counteracting the ungenial effects of phyſical cauſes, and of humanizing national characters, be they ever ſo ſavage.

But leſt we ſhould ſeem to deliver panegyric rather than argument, let us examine the tendency of ſome of the peculiar precepts of the Chriſtian ethics. And here a queſtion of the firſt importance is preſented to our conſideration. Are we to lay the reſtraint on the thoughts or the actions ? Our Saviour has pronounced a final and deciſive judgment. He has declared, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, falſe witneſs, blaſphemies—Theſe are the things which defile a man." We know from the nature of the human conſtitution, that a ſyſtem which prohibits actions and leaves the thoughts to range at liberty is ineffectual and defeats its purpoſe. The abſolute neceſſity of this authoritative preſcription muſt be apparent to every one, who is acquainted with the force of mental and active habits. As mental habits generally precede active habits, and are produced by repeated acts of inward practical principles, we may form ſome, though a very inadequate

adequate idea of the precaution neceſſary in acquiring right notions of virtues and vices; of veracity, juſtice, benevolence and charity; of falſhood, revenge, malice and envy.* From the extreme pliability of our minds we inſenſibly attain a conſtant aptneſs, an almoſt involuntary facility of falling into a certain train of thinking. As we are nurſed in truth or error, true or erroneous opinions are gradually wrought into our temper and character; they increaſe with their increaſe and are confirmed with their confirmation. We ſeldom think of recogniſing the tenets which are incorporated into our habits. They ſoon become nearly indifferent to us. But we ſhould remember that the conſequences are by no means confined to our own boſoms. They are tranſmitted to our deſcendants, they are perpetuated to the lateſt poſterity as monuments of our fame or infamy.

The ſame obſervations apply to active as to mental habits; for the thoughts are the womb where actions are generated, organized and matured. It ſeems then to be a natural conſequence, that the formation and ſtructure of man, as a moral being, will vary with his varying food. Whatever therefore enters into the very eſſence of moral obligation, may be emphatically ſtyled the

* Butler's Anal. Part 1. chap. 5.

food

food of the moral conſtitution. The exiſtence of a future ſtate of retribution has been indiſputably proved by the Chriſtian religion, and by entering into this eſſence adds a peculiar force to its practical precepts. Aſſiſted by this, and other powerful and collateral motives, theſe practical precepts become capable of clearing away the rubbiſh of paſſion, prejudice and ſophiſtry; of forming and finiſhing the moſt perfect model of which imperfect humanity is ſuſceptible; of educing, corroborating, expanding, cultivating, purifying and directing the powers of the human ſoul, ſo far as the limits of poſſibility extend. As delivered by the infallible Son of God, they are in reality the only true touchſtone of moral rectitude, that can teach us accurately to diſcriminate between actions and the morality of actions; thus qualified they become a pure, a glorious, an inexhauſtible fountain of emanation, from which rays of truth will ſtream forth to the remoteſt ages. "To do to others, what we would have others do to us"—"to live peaceably with all men"—"to cultivate a meek and charitable diſpoſition"—"to love our enemies, to bleſs them that curſe us, to do good to them that hate us, to pray for them that deſpitefully uſe us and perſecute us"; are precepts that have a conſiderable

claim

claim to original excellence. And, as the nature of every thing is moſt clearly aſcertained in its diminutive portions, the precepts that illumine every page of the ſacred volume, teach us that the ſocial affections are to be ramified and expanded through every regular and poſſible gradation, from domeſtic tenderneſs and ſympathy, to general benevolence and philanthropy; from private ſenſibility and mildneſs, to love the moſt univerſal and charity the moſt diſintereſted. The means of charity indeed are to be proportioned to the capacity of the ſubject and the exigencies of the object. This regular and diſtinct proceſs is the only ſafe and effectual method to prevent virtues from aſſuming the nature of vices; from becoming vapid, nugatory and indeterminate, and by conſequence eventually ſubverſive of the true intereſts of ſociety. Deſtroy this ſymmetry, this eternal order of things, this beautiful ſubordination of parts, and the mad frolic, the daring experiment, the unjuſtifiable licence will transform man into a perfect chaos of anarchy and crime. Benevolence and humanity will degenerate into a ſavage and brutal ferocity, delicate refinement into coarſe vulgarity, liberty into ſlavery, and public ſpirit into wild carnage and promiſcous deſtruction.

The love we owe to God as his creatures * ; to our neighbours as our fellow-creatures; the reciprocal duties of parents and children, of maſters and ſervants are ſtated in the moſt unexceptionable manner : the neceſſity and utility of obedience to ſuperior magiſtrates are enforced and illuſtrated by the moſt ſtriking injunctions and unequivocal examples. The moral attributes of the Deity are placed in the cleareſt and moſt rational point of view ; his inflexible juſtice, that is ſo admirably formed to check the lawleſs wiſhes of the fanatic and the ſenſualiſt ; his extenſive mercy, that is ſo eminently adapted to counteract the unkindly influence of deſpair. Were an implicit deference paid to the unerring precepts of Chriſtianity, much of that miſery that mankind ſo awfully experience, would entirely diſappear. The love of fame, however, has been the darling paſſion of man ; the ſtores of wit, rhetoric and poetry have been laviſhed in its praiſe ; it has been dignified with the various, the brilliant, and the ſplendid titles of magnanimity, fortitude and pa-

* Before the Chriſtian Religion had, as it were, humanized the idea of the Divinity, and brought it ſomewhat nearer to us, there was very little ſaid of the love of God. The followers of Plato have ſomething of it, and only ſomething ; the other writers of Pagan antiquity, whether poets or philoſophers, nothing at all. *Burke Sub. & Beau. P. 2. S. 5.*

triotiſm,

triotiſm. No wonder then that the dazzling influence of this idol has extinguiſhed the ſight of its thoughtleſs and giddy votaries. But ſingular and paradoxical as our opinions may be thought, no paſſion has been more fatal to the human ſpecies.

After all, it will admit of a doubt, whether the conduct of mankind would have been much influenced by the Chriſtian religion, had it not eſtabliſhed the proof of a future ſtate of retribution. Viewed in this light its authority becomes paramount and ſupreme. And here Chriſtianity is to be conſidered not merely as a republication, but as an authoritative republication of natural religion: had revelation indeed been confined to this comparatively narrow ſphere, it would indicate the higheſt ignorance and preſumption to deny its efficacy upon the human inclinations, eſpecially when we reflect on the extreme want of natural piety and virtue amongſt the heathens. But Chriſtianity is not merely an authoritative promulgation of natural religion; it reveals a particular diſpenſation of God the Father, carrying on by his Son and Spirit, for the recovery and ſalvation of mankind, who are repreſented in the Scriptures to be in a ſtate of ruin. In this grand diſpenſation of Providence, the Son and Spirit

have their reſpective offices; the Son as Mediator between God and man, as teaching the efficacy of repentance, and rendering that repentance efficacious; the Spirit as Sanctifier to renew our nature and to qualify us for the enjoyment of a future ſtate. The relations then, in which theſe Perſons are placed with regard to man, are the ſubject of revelation, are fixed and poſitive inſtitutions and partake as much of a moral nature as any rational inſtitution whatever. Theſe revealed inſtitutions declare the purpoſes of the Almighty with reſpect to man, and are formed to excite in us the uſeful paſſions of reverence, honour, love, truſt, gratitude, fear and hope. * Conſidered in this light, the moral obligations of Chriſtianity fall with redoubled force upon the minds of its genuine profeſſors, and make them extremely cautious in their opinions and conduct; and the depravity of mankind ſufficiently evinces the neceſſity of this caution.

Conſidered however ſimply, as authoritatively promulgating natural religion, the Chriſtian diſpenſation has had a ſenſible influence on the public judgment of morals, and a ſtill more ſenſible influence on the ſyſtems of caſuiſts that have flouriſhed ſubſequent to the Chriſtian era. Since

* Butler's Anal. Part 2. Chap 1.

that

that eventful period, the ſcience of caſuiſtry has been by no means ſo whimſical and abſurd. The New Teſtament is the ſtandard to which we are taught to refer the reſolution of every moral doubt in which human happineſs can poſſibly be concerned. We can appeal to a ſurer teſt than the vague principles of feeling; our concluſions are leſs arbitrary, and conſequently the number of our errors both ſpeculative and practical is conſiderably diminiſhed. The certainty of its truths has overawed the moſt daring; and really (for there are many excellent moral precepts amongſt deiſtical writers) could we unravel the fine and intricate web of the human mind, and develop its myſterious ſprings; could we inveſtigate its various dependencies, connexions and relations, and trace its motions from the dawn of reaſon, through the prejudices of education and the diverſified habits of life, we ſhould be able to trace many of thoſe excellencies, and much of that greater certainty which give them ſuch a decided ſuperiority over ancient moraliſts, to the impreſſions they have early, caſually and inſenſibly acquired from the precepts of Chriſtianity.

But the tenets of the Chriſtian religion have operated not merely as a divine law, as a meaſure of ſin and duty; their influence has been very extenſive upon the law of honor and the civil law,

law : upon the former by habituating us to more juſt and determinate ideas of virtue and vice, by pointing out to us the proper objects of commendation and diſgrace, and by teaching us with what deteſtation and abhorrence we ought to behold thoſe determined enemies of human intercourſe, who ſcruple not to overleap the bounds of honour and decorum : upon the latter by cauſing the removal of many uſages, which were actually, though not deſignedly ſubverſive of the true intereſts of ſociety ; by mitigating the rigour of particular laws, by prohibiting particular cuſtoms,* and by ſuggeſting and making regulations

* For the honour of humanity we ſhould be extremely happy to produce as an inſtance to illuſtrate our poſition, the prohibition of that execrable practice, the African Trade. Could Mr. Wilberforce and his worthy ſupporters accompliſh the total abolition of that wholeſale traffic in fleſh and blood, they might emphatically be called the Fathers of that country. On the contrary, the defenders of this infamous commerce, whatever be their rank, merit our ſevereſt cenſure.

Merciful heaven !
Thou rather with thy ſharp and ſulph'rous bolt
Split'ſt the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the ſoft myrtle :—O, but man ! proud man,
Dreſt in a little brief authority,
Moſt ignorant of what he's moſt aſſur'd
His glaſſy eſſence ; like an angry ape,
Plays ſuch fantaſtic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

which

which tend in the higheſt degree to promote the happineſs of ſocial life; as we ſhall ſee more at large, when we conſider the effects of the Chriſtian religion on the ſocial powers of man.

In the middle ages, it muſt be conteſſed, that the dreams and impulſes, the viſions and illuminations excited by the over-heated fancy of every fanatic, who could obtrude them upon the notice of a credulous public, were converted into rules of hope, faith, worſhip and practice; that the popes hurled their ſpiritual thunders at the heads of thoſe who preſumed to queſtion the divinity of their ſaints and the efficacy of their canonized bones. Hence the whole attention of mankind was abſorbed by traditionary fables, and legendary tales. We cannot wonder then, that the wretched morality of Gregory the Great, a confuſed maſs of ſuperſtitious trifles and myſtical abſurdities, was received with univerſal applauſe and admiration. *

But the period when the mind was to aſſume the habit of thinking, and the capacity of deciding for itſelf was haſtening on apace. At the Reformation, that fabric of ſuperſtition, which had long been held in the profoundeſt veneration, received thoſe rude ſhocks from which it never can

* Moſheim, Cent. 6, Part 2. Chap. 4.

recover

recover ; the genial rays of liberty, learning and religion burſt through the breaches of the priſon, and diſcovered the form of that monſter, which had diſturbed the quiet and chained up the ſinews of mankind. In a moment, and as it were by enchantment, the beautiful edifices of a Bacon, a Grotius and a Puffendorf aroſe from the firm baſis of Chriſtianity. Theſe grand luminaries of ſcience have ever conſidered our religion as the ſtrongeſt and only ſure link of civil ſociety ; as the vigorous root from which every branch of moral duty was to be derived. The principles they have deduced from it, have had a perceptible influence on the morals of the public. Theſe principles have corrected the ſtrangely ſophiſticated habits of individuals, harmonized the various departments and ranks of ſociety, and ſmoothed the too artificial and of courſe invidious diſtinctions of life. By co-operating with every uſeful quality in government and laws, they have reduced them to a more unqueſtionable ſhape and gradually removed whatever was injurious or defective in their conſtitution.

Some mere ſpeculators have certainly endeavoured to ſeparate morality and religion, and to rear the moral fabric on a baſis different from that of Chriſtianity ; but their projects have been highly

highly prejudicial to the true intereſts of ſociety. In contemplating the ethical ſyſtems of the ancients we meet with many faults. We know their ſituation. Their errors were frequently involuntary ; we are accordingly induced to make very large allowances. But we reſerve a treatment of another kind for thoſe bold experimenters, who have had an opportunity of enjoying the light of religion, and who, by way of trying their infamous art, ſcruple not to drain the life-blood of man, in order to fill up his arteries with their own monſtrous ingredients. If any one be ſo fooliſh as to imagine that religion and morality can be divided from each other, even ſo much as in idea, he will do well to examine the miſerable traſh, the filthy ſcraps which theſe ſcavengers have ſwept from the ſewers of a brothel ; to conſider the nature and tendency of the ethical ſyſtems which theſe daſhing empirics have been able to jumble together independant of Chriſtianity.

An intelligence eternal, incomprehenſible and infinite, is indeed admitted by ſome of theſe philoſophiſts. * But if we may judge from the inſults which they wantonly and audaciouſly fling

* Voltaire Philoſ. Ig. 16, 17, 18, Ques. Vol. 16.

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* Voltaire Philoſ. Ig. 16, 17, 18, Ques. Vol. 16.

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in the face of their Creator, it is not uncharitable to infer that the Deity they acknowledge, they acknowledge but to brave. They either entirely overlook his moral character, the very thing we ought chiefly to admire, or wiſh to explain away all his moral excellencies. We are told, " that we ought to love God for not ſubjecting us to any thing but our own nature" *; " that there is no merit or crime in intention " †; " that all morality may be reſolved into the principles of ſelf-love "; " that feeling is the true ſtandard of ethical ſyſtems, that what we feel to be right, is right, and that what we feel to be wrong, is wrong " ‡; " that no gratification, however ſenſual, can of itſelf be eſteemed vicious " §; " that adultery muſt be practiſed if we would obtain all the advantages of life, and that female infidelity when known is a ſmall thing and when unknown nothing." ||

* " A l'égard de l'amour de Dieu, loin que cette idée le puiſſe affaiblir, j'eſtime qu'aucune autre n'eſt plus propre à l'augmenter ; puis q'elle me fait connâitre que Dieu eſt intime à mon être, qu'il me les donne libéralement, ſans reproche, ſans intérêt, ſans m'aſſujettir à autre choſe qu' à ma propre nature. *Spinoſa as quoted by Voltaire,* Philoſ. Ig. Ques. 24. V. 16.

† Volney's Law of Nature, p. 18.

‡ Roſſeau's Emilie. § Hume's Eſſay on Luxury.

|| Quand on le ſçait c'eſt peu de choſe :

It would be tedious to prove a point, which depends ſo much upon experience and the knowledge of mankind, but I preſume it may be laid down as a poſition indiſputably true, that human nature is capable of any degree of depravity. Hence, were the ſtandard of morality ever ſo depreſſed, we may reaſonably conclude, that the generality of men would ſink below it. The principles we have juſt noticed have their foundation only in the depravity of human nature; whenever then, they are ſubſtituted for the ſublime and ſimple precepts of the New-Teſtament; whenever a ſickly vapour is to ſupply the deficiencies of the ſun, the wild reign of anarchy will commence and ſociety will be convulſed to its centre. There will be an end of all honour and decency and ſecurity. Reaſon will become ſubordinate to paſſion and order to confuſion. *

Quand on ne le ſçait pas, ce n'eſt rien.

Hume in his Dialogue on moral Sentiments, quotes this maxim of La Fontaine with apparent approbation.

* Cicero obſerves upon Cato the ſecond, Cato optime ſentit, ſed nocet interdum reipublicæ; loquitur enim tanquam in republicâ Platonis, non tanquam in fæce Romuli. —From this obſervation it appears that it is equally an error to exceed as to fall ſhort of the ſtandard which is erected for practical purpoſes; but I imagine that the conſequences of theſe errors are totally different.

In countries, however, which ſtill have the gratitude to confeſs the kindly influence of Chriſtianity, vice has never been imbodied nor error taught ſyſtematically. It affords no ſmall conſolation to every reflecting mind that the chief ſupporters of the Chriſtian religion are the maſter-builders in the ſcience of morality. Men of real and unſophiſticated feelings, who have not been completely ſteeled againſt the dictates of common ſenſe and the calls of humanity; who are not, and we truſt never will, become converts to the New Philoſophy.

THIRDLY, *On the Social Powers.*

" It may be truly affirmed, that there was never any philoſophy, religion or other diſcipline, which did ſo plainly and highly exalt the good which is communicative, and depreſs the good which is private and particular, as the holy faith."

Bacon's Advan. of Learn. Book 2

That the private and public management of the heathen world aſſumes a very different aſpect, when contraſted with that of Chriſtian countries, is a fact which few perſons can be diſpoſed to deny. A queſtion therefore of no ſmall importance

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is preſented to our minds. To what cauſe are we to aſcribe ſo conſiderable an effect? The mental faculties of Pagans and Chriſtians are naturally equal; and if auſpicious effects can be juſtly ſaid to reſult from phyſical cauſes, the Pagans have, upon the whole, a very great advantage. The imitative and progreſſive nature of the human mind will be urged in vain, to account for a difference ſo permanent and eſſential. Moral as well as phyſical beings, without the interference of ſome efficient cauſe, are ſubject to certain fixed rules. Analogy informs us, that they have hitherto had their infancy, manhood and decrepitude, with the riſe, the continuation, and the decline of the empires where they flouriſhed. The page of hiſtory ſacred or prophane, does not furniſh one ſolitary inſtance of a people, that have, by their own efforts, emerged from idolatry and the immorality that attends it. Had there not exiſted ſome cauſe then, for this palpable difference, there is reaſon to preſume that the ſtate of ſociety in Europe, would have worn but a ſimilar appearance, in its ſimilar ſtages, with the ſtate of ſociety in heathen countries, ancient or modern. Chriſtianity excepted, the page of hiſtory makes mention of no phenomenon, adequate to produce this difference. We think it juſt therefore to conſider

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the Chriſtian religion as the proximate efficient cauſe of the above-mentioned difference. By balancing the advantages enjoyed in the reſpective ſocieties of Chriſtians and Heathens, we ſhall be enabled to form a more deciſive judgment, which ſide preponderates.

In natural ſociety, man is in circumſtances extremely miſerable and forlorn. He is involved in a myſterious darkneſs, that caſts a damp over his livelieſt hopes. The information he is able to collect from the light of nature being extremely partial, vague and uncertain, muſt leave him almoſt entirely ignorant of the end of his exiſtence. In ſuch an infinite combination and uncertainty of circumſtances, there are few cauſes to produce permanent habits. His life becomes a ſeries of deſultory, unconnected acts, varying indeed in their tendency with the quality of the objects which he happens to ſeize in the general ſcramble. So precarioufly ſituated, either his own, or the experience which tradition has imperfectly tranſmitted, can be his only guide. But error is ſuſceptible of innumerable variations, while truth has but one ſimple way of being ſuch. That he will err then is highly probable. Overwhelmed with doubts and fears and hurried along by his unruly paſſions, he ſeems to pay more than his

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full contingent, to the contributions levied on mortality.

In a ſtate of nature or civilization, religion opens a different proſpect to his view. As an individual ſolely, the eternal world is an object that affords him a continual, a pleaſing and a growing gagement. It has a tendency to cheer, as well as compoſe the ſoul, to baniſh wanton and diſſolute mirth, to fill the mind with calmneſs and ſerenity, to furniſh out "a ſcene of tranquil virtue, that would ſtop an angel on his errands of mercy." But the conſolations which this aſylum affords, are never fully realized and experienced, till a man is deprived of every earthly bleſſing. When the heart bleeds from the wound of recent misfortune, when refined reaſonings are merely adapted to inſult the feelings of the ſoul, when every deluſive proſpect of ambition is now at an end, and when, amid the laſt throes and ſtruggles of departing nature, the cold hand of death arreſts the vital principle; Revelation removes the thick film from the eye and diſcovers a ſcene of grandeur too exquiſite for human conception.

In this way, religion has promoted human happineſs, in how great a degree I know not.

Since the nature and qualities of every principle are moſt accurately determined in their mi-

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nuteſt ſubdiviſions ; whatever can be ſuppoſed to influence the conſtitution of the more private affections of the mind, muſt, by conſequence, be ſuppoſed to influence the ſame affections when dilated to a larger ſize. Hence we may form ſome idea of the pernicious tendency of falſe religion and of the ſuperior efficacy of true religion, upon the appearance of domeſtic ſociety.

From the numerous inconveniences inſeparable from a ſtate of nature, and from the want of certain poſitive inſtitutions, men reaſonably enough look up to ſome perſon of more enlarged experience and of more acute obſervation, to whom they may refer the reſolution of their doubts and the arbitration of their differences. They would wiſh to ſupply the defects of nature, that has ſcarce formed any bond of union to hold men together, by a more general ſtandard, through the medium of which they might more nearly decide upon the merits or demerits of their actions. This was the origin of civil ſociety. But, as it may eaſily be imagined, it was that kind of civil ſociety, that is little ſuperior, perhaps in many caſes inferior in its advantages to a ſtate of nature. For, from the ignorance or deſign of the legiſlator, the minuteneſs, the multiplicity, the perplexity of the caſes which are continually occurring ; from the want of that union of ſpeculative ability with practical wiſdom

wiſdom, which is ſo rare an acquiſition in the moſt cultivated ſtages of ſociety; their laws muſt frequently have diſappointed the intention of the impoſer, or have been diſtorted by caprice. But farther;—as no human inſtitution poſſeſſes of itſelf, ſufficient ſtrength to unite two paſſions, ſo often at variance, as the will and true intereſt of mankind, and to curb their licentious deſires, in this barbarous condition; there muſt exiſt ſome more powerful motive to correct their actions. Fortunately human nature, in ſome meaſure, furniſhes this corrective. For it may be indiſputably proved from obſervations made upon children and upon the wavering tempers of thoſe perſons, the circumſtances of whoſe lives are more ſubject to the viciſſitudes of fortune, that man is naturally addicted to ſuperſtition. This diſpoſition of mind is well ſuited to the purpoſes of deſigning men, who would ſcarcely overlook ſo favourable an opportunity of riſing into power.

Thus eccleſiaſtical and civil government became incorporated and in part ſupplied each other's deficiencies. That a ſyſtem, however, which wears the complexion of ignorance or fraud on the very face of it, muſt unavoidably be prolific in error or in crime, is a truth ſo evident to the moſt common underſtanding, that it affords ſome matter of ſurpriſe

priſe why theſe political guides made uſe of religion only for political purpoſes; for no ſooner were theſe purpoſes anſwered than they abandoned the individual to the guidance of his paſſions. But if we conſider the dangerous ſituations in which they were placed, and the numerous temptations to which they were expoſed; if we maturely reflect too upon the conduct of men in ſimilar capacities, even under the ſuperior advantages of the Chriſtian diſpenſation, we ſhall be induced to make large allowances for the common propenſities of human nature. After all, it is remarkable that the prieſts of the ancients paid ſo little attention to the moral character; that they never profeſſed to teach men virtue. It is rather notorious that many of the domeſtic vices of antiquity were ſo far from being forbidden by the laws of the community or condemned by the precepts of philoſophy, that they frequently met with the warmeſt applauſe and approbation. It may, perhaps, be urged, that philoſophers made it their buſineſs to teach men virtue. Admitting this to be the caſe, which is admitting a great deal too much, experience informs us but too well, what improvements are to be expected from refined reaſonings. The total inefficiency of philoſophy appears to have been fully evinced in the Auguſtan age*. This deſertion

* The knowledge of the whole world, which had been col-

tion of the individual, to follow the propenſities of his nature and to act as ſuited his circumſtances and inclinations, is undoubtedly one eſſential cauſe of that great difference in the economy of Heathen and Chriſtian ſociety.

One very material difference, that prevails in the domeſtic management of Pagans and Chriſtians, is the total abolition of ſlavery in all the Chriſtian countries in Europe. A more probable reaſon cannot be aſſigned for the ſhocking cruelties and the barbarous and fierce manners of Paganiſm than the abominable practice of domeſtic ſlavery. By the toleration of this practice every man of diſtinction became a petty tyrant and was educated amid the adulations, the ſubmiſſion and low debaſement of his ſlaves. When ſo nefarious an uſage is overlooked or ſanctioned by public authority; when the ſtill ſmall voice of humanity is loſt in the din of ſelf-intereſt; when a man's own capricious humour is the only tribunal to which he is reſponble, his conſcience generally receives a very favourable

lected in preceding ages, is to be found in the Roman writers of the Auguſtan age. All the philoſophy in Cicero (particularly the Grecian); all the general and ideal beauty and perfection in Virgil; all the active life in Horace. If, with theſe advantages, the Auguſtan age did not hinder men from being extremely vicious, it ſeems as if we might fairly conclude, that mere Philoſophy is unequal to the work. *Hey's Lect. Theol. B. 1. C. 19. S. 12.*

able verdict and becomes much at its eaſe; cuſtom ſubſides into nature. Hence, in the Athenian world at leaſt, the phyſical ſtrength was ſubjected to the mercy of a few tyrants.

The indulgence of one cruel habit neceſſarily paves the way for the indulgence of another. The unwarrantable prerogative that we are accuſtomed to exerciſe over perſons indifferent to us, ſoon falls on a relation, a child or perhaps a father. It frequently happened, and it does to this day *, that a perſon might recogniſe in his ſevereſt enemy, one that was bound to him by every tie, in heaven and on earth. The expoſure of children and the murder of aged parents form a ſecond and third cruel uſage in the annals of Heatheniſm. Theſe uſages, the former more eſpecially, was become ſo familiarized and habituated to the mind, as to be ſanctioned by the laws of the legiſlator and applauded by the precepts of the philoſopher.

The pernicious effects produced on ſociety, by the toleration of polygamy and by the inſtitution of gladiatorial ſhows were great, much greater, I believe, than is generally imagined. Why ſhould we mention, in the former caſe, the ſubjection of ſo many females to the caprice of one man,

* Not leſs than two thouſand children are annually expoſed in the ſtreets of Pekin. Some of theſe are ſaved by the Chriſtian Miſſionaries. *Macart. Emb. V.* 2. *C.* 2.

man, the animoſities and jealouſies of the wives, the diſſolution of the intellectual and active faculties and the ſhameful neglect of the children? Why, in the latter, the cruel habits ariſing from ſpectacles ſo horrible and diſguſting and the actual miſery inflicted on the individual himſelf. But it would far exceed the limits of our plan, were we barely to enumerate the toleration of unnatural crimes, of Bacchanalian orgies and human ſacrifices; the frontleſs atrocity of conſecrating public ſtews and brothels to certain divinities, and a catalogue of other vices that have their exiſtence in heathen countries alone. Suffice it to obſerve, that there are certain grand and fixed principles in human nature; certain modes of proceeding from particulars to generals, according to the eternal order of things. To err in any one of theſe points is to err fundamentally. Among the very firſt and moſt eſſential of theſe principles, ſo eſſential indeed, that, without it, the habitudes of ſociety become perfectly incorrigible; among the foremoſt of theſe principles ought to be claſſed the proper management of the more private affections of the mind. Theſe private affections are the point from whence the public affections are to radiate and diverge. A virtuous man, an indulgent father, a kind maſter, are but different

expreſſions

expreſſions for a good citizen. When it is once determined then, from accumulated obſervation and experience, that theſe principles are fixed and infallibly true ; we appeal to common ſenſe, whether that ſyſtem is not fundamentally erroneous, which gives ſo narrow a ſcope to the exerciſe of the milder virtues, and ſo wide a ſcope to the exerciſe of the more deſtructive vices ; whether that man, who is habituated to ſcenes of carnage, will ever become a peaceful ſubject ; and finally, whether that government can be permanent, which encourages and authorizes uſages ſo diſgraceful to humanity.

But let us caſt our eyes to a different and more captivating ſcene. The eloquent calls of the Chriſtian religion diſturbed the dangerous ſlumbers of conſcience and placed in the boſoms of mankind an infallible umpire, to point out the moral rectitude or pravity of their actions. Only conceive the interpoſition of a religion, which, in countries where it was profeſſed, could put an effectual ſtop to the uſages of ſlavery, to the expoſure of children, to polygamy and gladiatorial ſhows. Only endeavour to make a moral and not an arithmetical calculation of the auſpicious effects ; to argue, not according to the method made uſe of in the natural world, that if a determinate object operate on a determinate object, the conſequences themſelves

ſelves are immediately determinate ; but according to the method, which, in ſuch important caſes, ought to be uſed in the moral world, that the real effects of a moral or indeterminate object, acting on a moral or indeterminate object can never be calculated till the ſum of human exiſtence be completed. Conſidered in this extenſive point of view, it is impoſſible to approximate to a conception much leſs to a calculation of the beneficial conſequences of the Chriſtian religion. Every deſtructive vice it has prevented, every pernicious uſage it has removed; does and will for ever loudly proclaim its happy influence. Conſidered in this and this light only; it has been infinitely more ſerviceable to ſociety than all human inſtitutions put together. Here perhaps it may be objected that the ſame mode of arguing may be applied to the vices of Chriſtianity. " But ſoft—by regular degrees, not yet," For it muſt be remembered that it is not in the nature of Chriſtianity to give birth or countenance to a ſingle vice. And though we were to admit this poſition, (a poſition, by the way, palpably falſe,) I ſhould feel for the too refined ſenſibility, for the over nice and too prudiſh delicacy of that man, who would turn away with diſguſt from the majeſty of a Gothic edifice, upon ſeeing a few paltry blemiſhes, thinly ſcattered on the exterior of the building; who could

could think that the ſpots which float round the ſurface of the ſun, would more than overbalance the magnificence of the whole, and the particular beauties that continually flow from that fountain of light.*

If we now view religion as an active principle, and conſider what mankind are with it; and then adopt a ſimilar mode of arguing and apply it to poſitive fact. If we conceive it as calling forth many of thoſe affections of the mind, which were little known and leſs exerciſed among the ancients; as foſtering, as encouraging every feeling that is uſeful and ornamental to ſociety; as eſtabliſhing a permanent union between the ſexes, and rendering the relations formed by that union, indiſſoluble: If we conceive it, not as ſuperſeding, but as corroborating every neceſſary law, as ſupplying the defects of civil inſtitutions, by extending its domain over the conſcience, and fomenting thoſe "compunctions viſitings of nature", by ſtriking at private vices where no human law ever reaches: If we conſider too, that moral feelings and ſentiments communicate a particular tone and ſignificance to human laws; that they give them much of that importance which they enjoy in

* The harmony of a ſcience ſupporting each part the other, is and ought to be the true and brief confutation and ſuppreſſion of all the ſmaller ſort of objections.

Bacon's Adv. of Learn. B. 1.

in the eye of mankind; that the latter ſeldom affect us, but that the former are what debaſe or exalt us. What a vaſt field for inquiry is expanded to our view?

We have every reaſon to ſuppoſe, that the primitive Chriſtians made the precepts of their divine Maſter, a rule of conduct. Theſe precepts were founded on the doctrine of a future ſtate; of courſe were eminently calculated to conſole them under oppoſition and calamity. Even in the apoſtolic times, the numerous converts to this religion were widely extended over various parts of Europe, Aſia and Africa. Nor can any reaſonable ſuſpicion be entertained of the partiality of this account, for it proceeds, not merely from intereſted perſons, but from men, who were either indifferent or declared enemies to the cauſe. Its influence was diffuſed over villages, cities and countries, over every age, rank and condition, the moſt diſcriminating feature of whoſe character was purity of life and ſimplicity of manners*: The rule of whoſe conduct has been confeſſed by one of the moſt formidable enemies of Chriſtianity to be one continued leſſon of the ſtricteſt morality, of juſtice, of benevolence and of univerſal charity† In a ſtill later period, it ſpread over vaſt tracts of countries

* Plin. Epiſt. L. 10. Ep. 97. † Boling. Vol. 5. p. 188, &c.

in the moſt diſtant provinces, adorned, ſupported and propagated by advocates illuſtrious for their talents and diſtinguiſhed by their knowledge in every department of ſcience. And there is ſurely no one ſo fooliſh, as to deny the utility and neceſſity of confining within more certain limits, of attracting to more noble objects, that mind and thoſe thoughts which are formed to wander through eternity.

> Sure there was need of ſocial intercourſe,
> Benevolence, and peace, and mutual aid,
> Between the nations, in a world that ſeem'd
> To toll the death-bell of its own deceaſe,
> And by the voice of all its elements
> To preach the gen'ral doom.

It is to be lamented, however, that Chriſtianity did not always meet with equal encouragement and ſucceſs. But, though mingled with the paſſions and prejudices of mankind and ſcarcely diſtinguiſhable amid the univerſal hubbub of the more turbulent periods, it ſtill retained a ſenſible influence over families. It was the ſpirit of our religion, that mild ſpirit which prohibits both the indulgence of reſentful propenſities and the retaliation of injuries, which put a ſtop to thoſe dreadful animoſities of the barons, ſo awfully exemplified

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in the hiſtory of the middle ages; which checked thoſe perpetual feuds of the darker times, thoſe paroxyſms of phrenſy, which pervaded and infuriated whole families, and literally ſwept away ſucceſſive generations; which gradually ſubdued that pride and fierceneſs, that bitterneſs and rancour of diſpoſition which ſo tremendouſly convulſed the government of our own and other nations.

It was the increaſing prevalence of the ſame principle that gave riſe to the ſingular but beneficial inſtitution of chivalry*: An inſtitution through which religion infuſed its ſalutary influence, and which tempered the valour of its profeſſors, by uniting in the ſame perſon the various and uſeful virtues of courteſy, humanity, honour and juſtice: An inſtitution exactly adapted to the taſte and genius of the martial nobles and which diverted their attention from domeſtic animoſities, to curb the inſolence of oppreſſors, to protect the orphan and the widow, to redreſs wrongs and remove grievances. It was then, that war was conducted with leſs ferocity, that more poliſhed and gentle manners were reckoned among the characteriſtics of a rational creature; when humanity, as well as courage, was deemed the ornament of knighthood; when a ſcrupulous adherence to truth, with the moſt religious

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* Robertſon's Introd. to Charles 5. Sect. 1.

determination to fulfil every engagement, was enumerated among the lordly virtues.

It is the ſame principle blended with the ſame inſtitution, though varied in its appearance with the varying ſtate of human affairs, which influences the preſent and will, ſo long as it prevails, influence every ſucceeding generation. "It is this unbought grace of life, this cheap defence of nations, this nurſe of manly ſentiment," that has continued to ſtamp a character on modern Europe. "It is that ſenſibility of principle, that chaſtity of honour which felt a ſtain like a wound, which inſpired courage whilſt it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched and under which vice itſelf loſt half its evil by loſing all its groſsneſs;" it is this, that diſtinguiſhes Great Britain above every other nation "in nature's, if not, in time's empire."

It is this ſpirit, which has ſecured amid the mild majeſty of private life, that variety of little gratifications and endearments, which we are formed to feel with the moſt exquiſite ſenſibility; thoſe winning and attractive graces; thoſe amiable and ſofter virtues; thoſe ten thouſand decencies, which ſmooth and beautify our path through this to a higher and nobler ſtate of exiſtence. Theſe advantages may be thought ſecondary, uſeleſs and

inſignificant

inſignificant. Secondary they are, no doubt, but by no means uſeleſs and inſignificant. We think ourſelves free to confeſs, that no drapery is either uſeleſs or inſignificant which conſtitutes half the happineſs of human kind, and which is ſo eminently fitted to clothe and cheriſh human nature.

But above all, it is this principle, which has reared a monument as durable as the world, I mean, the inſtitution of charitable houſes; an inſtitution that has ſecured the morals and exiſtence of millions and millions of our ſpecies. No ordinary advantages theſe; reſulting too, I preſume, from the Chriſtian religion. For it is impoſſible to refer circumſtances that are equally unknown in the rudeſt as in the moſt poliſhed ſtages of Paganiſm, to a cauſe different from the prevalence of this religion and the better underſtanding and right meaning of its ſpirit.

Since governments are merely collections of individuals and families, and ſince private and public affections partake much of the ſame qualities; the former indeed preceding the latter in the eternal order of nature, and the latter differing from the former in that they are expanded to greater dimenſions and act in a more enlarged ſphere; it ſeems to follow as a natural conſequence, that Chriſtianity muſt have had no inconſiderable influence

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on more public inſtitutions. The truth of this obſervation may be more ſatisfactorily proved from a comparative view of public ſociety in Pagan and Chriſtian countries.

In every community, there are men of more real or pretended ſanctity of character, or of greater intellectual improvements than the generality. To ſuch perſons, as to beings of a ſuperior order, the majority naturally enough commit the adminiſtration of their affairs. Whatever claim to ſincerity theſe guardians of the ſacred rights of the people might originally poſſeſs, they quickly found their influence too great not to abuſe it. They ſtill, however, indulged their deluded followers in their popular worſhip, every way adapted to the groſsneſs and verſatility of their underſtandings. To their own claſs they reſerved the peculiar privilege of foretelling future events by divination. They explained prodigies and interpreted dreams, conferred benefits and averted evils by means of augury and incantation. To their diſciples they communicated the meaning of their dogmas in ſymbolical characters and the profoundeſt allegory. A few only were initiated into their ſacred myſteries, and it was a ſettled maxim of their adminiſtration, to prevent the diffuſion of philoſophic and religious knowledge among the people. Thoſe opinions

opinions which teach mankind, that all their actions are influenced by the ſtars, that, by the help of magic, the forces of an enemy may be routed and an army ſtruck with a general panic, entirely ſuperſede every effort of man to meliorate his own and the condition of ſociety. Such was the political theology of the Egyptians, the Druids and the Eaſtern Magi.

That of Greece and Rome is equally irrational. A ſingle word from the Pythian prieſteſs was able to arm whole empires in the defence of a favourite warrior; while the ſame word, like a mildew or the magician's wand, withered the ſtrength and crumbled the ſinews of his adverſary.

The memory of ancient tranſactions is almoſt buried in oblivion; this however is certain, that many bloody battles of antiquity, from the time of Seſoſtris to that of Mahomet, were ultimately begun or continued, at the inſtigation of ſome ſuperſtitious device. If we conſider the mighty armies, headed by theſe warriors in theſe particular wars, the vaſt ſpaces they traverſed, the oppoſition they met with, together with all the natural accidents of war; if we conſider too the carnage committed on and by their adverſaries, we ſhall hear of many millions of the human ſpecies, falling in a cauſe, to which they had been incited by ſuperſtitious motives,

motives, and where they had not the leaſt ſhadow of concern; ſacrificed to the ambition, the pride and cruelty of a child, a fool or a madman.

A ſtriking contraſt forcibly obtrudes itſelf on the mind, when it reflects on the condition of thoſe countries, where the Chriſtian religion has predominated.

It had for a conſiderable time ſhone, with a ſteady and durable luſtre, upon individuals and families. In their private receſſes, they had long

> Felt how awful goodneſs is and ſeen
> Virtue in her ſhape how lovely.

But it was not till the time of Conſtantine, that

> Confuſion heard its voice and wild uproar
> Stood rul'd.

Religion then took a more active part and diſplayed a more conſpicuous figure; and a conſiderable portion of the globe ſtill retains the impreſſion which it received from the converſion of that Monarch. "By the edicts of toleration he removed the temporal diſadvantages, which had hitherto retarded the progreſs of Chriſtianity; and its active and numerous miniſters received a free permiſſion, a liberal encouragement to recommend the ſalutary truths of revelation by every argument, which could

could affect the reaſon or piety of mankind*." During this reign the heathen oracles were ſilenced and of courſe the number of thoſe frequent wars, which had cauſed ſo much havoc and deſtruction, was conſiderably diminiſhed. And as times of peace are more favourable for making laws, and as laws precede civilization, ſecurity and knowledge, the principles of government and the rights of nations were more clearly aſcertained. Religion ſupplied the defects and corrected the miſconceptions of government, and government ſummoned forth the powers and invigorated the proper energies of religion. In the reigns of Conſtantine and Theodoſius, we are ſeldom ſhocked with that diſguſting ſpecies of vice, that had vilified and diſgraced the reigns of their predeceſſors.

In the fourth and ſome ſucceeding † centuries, the Chriſtian Religion introduced an important change in the moral and political condition of the barbarians of the north, and of thoſe barbarians, who eſtabliſhed their kingdoms on the ruins of the weſtern empire. "They received at the ſame time the uſe of letters, ſo eſſential to a religion, whoſe doctrines are contained in a ſacred book; and while they ſtudied the divine truth, their minds were inſenſibly enlarged by the diſtant

* Gibbon, chap. 20.

† In the eighth and tenth Centuries, Gibbon, chap. 55.

view of hiſtory, of nature, of the arts and of ſociety."—— "In the moſt corrupt ſtate of Chriſtianity, the barbarians might learn juſtice from the law, and mercy from the goſpel: and if the knowledge of their duty was inſufficient to guide their actions or to regulate their paſſions, they were ſometimes reſtrained by conſcience, and frequently puniſhed by remorſe." ‡

In a later period, the Chriſtian religion degenerated into an illiberal ſuperſtition; partly from becoming blended and incorporated with the paſſions and prejudices of its profeſſors, and partly from the miſinterpretation and corruption it received from men of artifice and intrigue. It was natural for the mind to view, with a degree of veneration, the place that had witneſſed the ſufferings of a perſonage ſo illuſtrious as the Saviour of mankind. This veneration was heightened into the ſpirit of fanaticiſm by perſons, who, though perhaps themſelves originally deluded and impelled by the phrenſy of religious zeal, yet were afterwards by an eaſy and imperceptible tranſition, guided by motives of political cunning; and who, to accompliſh their political purpoſes, took a diſingenuous advantage of the paſſions of their deluded followers. Whether the motives for the Cruſades were

‡ Gibbon, chap. 37, Part 2.

ſpiritual

ſpiritual, temporal, or carnal; whether they aroſe from the expectation of plenary indulgencies for ſins or from the hope of enjoying ſome temporal favours *; in this our day little doubt can remain but that they were eventually beneficial to the nations of Europe. § Far be it from us to ſtand forwards the advocates for any ſpecies of oppreſſion. We wiſh not to palliate the immediate effects of the Cruſades. We deprecate exterminatory meaſures of every kind. We deprecate this meaſure as it ſtands ſtripped of every relation. A little diffidence, a little modeſty would become any man in deciding upon an event of ſuch magnitude. As Chriſtians however we acknowledge the agency of Providence. We know that it has interfered on occaſions of apparently leſs moment; that the moſt awful and wonderful things are frequently accompliſhed, on the moral theatre of the world, by inſtruments which we are apt to regard as abſurd, ridiculous and contemptible. The Cruſades might ſerve as a great ſhock, as a powerful cauſtic to rouſe Europe from that ſtate of ſtupidity and petrifaction. For it was this memorable event that revived the arts and ſciences in the weſtern empire. It was a ſight of countries more civilized

* Theſe are the motives aſſigned by Mr. Gibbon.

§ Robertſon's Introd. Charles V. Sec. 1.

than their own that incited the Cruſaders to enterprize. It was this, that gave birth to law, and of courſe to civilization, to ſecurity, to curioſity, to knowledge.

The predominating influence of Chriſtianity tended to aboliſh thoſe pernicious rights, which individuals claimed of making war with one another, and conſequently to eſtabliſh that equal adminiſtration of juſtice, which has long ranked Europe ſo high in the annals of juriſprudence; it has ultimately tended to remove two inſtitutions, the moſt whimſical and abſurd, that ever aroſe from the weakneſs of human reaſon, the trial by ordeal*, and judicial combats.

It is finally to that pacific diſpoſition of mind, which Chriſtianity is ſo admirably formed to produce, that the limits of power and obedience have been more accurately defined; that the law of nations and the means of civil intercourſe reſt on a

* It would be unjuſt to ſuppoſe that this inſtitution took its riſe, even from the perverſion of Chriſtianity. For it appears to have been an uſage, common among the ancients.

Ημεν δ' ετοιμοι και μυδρως αιρειν χεροιν
Και πυρ διερπειν, και θεως ορκωμοσειν,
Το μητε δρασαι, μητε τω ξυνειδεναι
Το πραγμα βυλευσανθι, μητ' ειργασμενω.

Soph. Antig. 270.

more

firmer and ſurer baſis. It was from a want of the Chriſtian religion, that the governments of the ancients were more unſettled, that their wars were more frequent, that their revolutions occurred ſo often and ſo fatally to the human ſpecies. True religion ſeems to be the only ſafe remedy, and ſo far as the remedy has been applied, the application has been ſucceſsful. The diffuſion of religious ſentiments through every rank of ſociety, is eſſential to the very being, much more to the well-being of civil government. It appears to be one of thoſe neceſſary, fixed and immutable principles, that are ſeldom called in queſtion by the thinking part of mankind at leaſt. It ſeems to exiſt in the will of God, who is ſuppoſed to wiſh the utmoſt happineſs of his creatures; and it certainly exiſts in the nature and conſtitution of man, who has ever been addicted to religion true or falſe. Religion in general, perfect or imperfect, is, and invariably has been, the very navel-ſtring that has nouriſhed civil ſociety; and it has always been found, that the conſtitution of the body politic has varied with its varying ſupport. * It is not

* Ου οχλον τε γυναικων, και παντος χυδαιου πληθους επαγαγειν λογῳ δυνατον φιλοσοφῳ, και προσκαλεσθαι προς ευσεβειαν, και οσιοτητα και πιςιν, αλλα δει και δια δεισιδαιμονιας· τουτο δ' ουκ ανευ μυθοποιϊας, και τερατειας. Κεραυνος γαρ, και αιγις, και τριαινα, και

in

in the power of wiſdom to make human nature eſſentially different from what it really is. Her pride and her buſineſs conſiſts in the proper uſe of the materials, which nature has furniſhed ready to her hand. A different mode of conduct may indeed be purſued for ſome time, but it is an infallible mark of ignorance, preſumption and inability. Its abſurdity will work its own antidote. The only alternative, therefore, ſeemed to be whether we ſhould diffuſe through the veins of the political conſtitution, the Chriſtian religion or ſome more degrading ſuperſtition. Of the tendency of the latter experiment, we were but too well aware, from the moſt authoritative documents. From principle we preferred the former, and the choice has been conſecrated by the unerring hand of time and ſanctified by the accumulated and continually accumulating experience of ages.

There has indeed been one ſolitary inſtance, equally unprincipled as unprecedented; one grand exception to this general rule, that has undoubtedly ariſen from a ſhameful ignorance of human

λαμπαδες, και δρακοντες, και θυρσολογχα των θεων οπλα, μυθοι· και πασα θεολογια αρχαϊκη· ταυτα δ' απεδειξαντο οι τας πολιτειας καταςησαμενοι μορμολυκας τινας προς τους νηπιοφρονας.

Strabo, Lib. 1.

nature

nature. The conſequences of this awful and intricate event it is difficult, perhaps impoſſible, to unravel. Men however, that have exerted every nerve, every muſcle to counteract the effects of this event, will find an infallible conſolation in reflecting, that they perform but their duty, when they reprobate and oppoſe the very appearance of error, even though the conſequences of that error may be ultimately beneficial to mankind. To deny the exiſtence of error in the French Revolution, is to pay a very poor compliment to experience, the life and ſoul of every thing; to thoſe maxims of departed wiſdom and greatneſs, that we are rightly accuſtomed to admire, to reverence and to follow. Add to theſe circumſtances, the injuſtice, to which the failure of ſuch an experiment will expoſe the remoteſt poſterity. Here many things may be urged, with different degrees of plauſibility, for the name and bleſſings of liberty. But liberty, when detached from its circumſtances and ſtripped of its relations, becomes ſpecious, indeterminate and deluſive. The true liberty of man is nothing but his real advantages. If he wiſhes to enjoy ſubſtantial benefits in perfection, he muſt ſurrender many, that he fan-

—Strabo's obſervation is true, or nature belies itſelf: it is applicable too in ſome degree or other to every religion, perfect or imperfect; to every ſtate of ſociety, barbarous or civilized.

cies

cies ſo. We naturally love, and it is our moſt ſacred duty to be tenacious of, thoſe bleſſings which are the ſubject of common experience. But we ſhould not be too ſanguine in our approbation of that ſuſpicious and wild kind of liberty, which may, in particular caſes, appear a bleſſing, but which will aſſuredly, upon the whole, be a tremenduous curſe. We ſhould live ſplendidly, but much too faſt in an atmoſphere of pure liberty; we muſt adminiſter the proper allay, before we can render it at all fit for practical purpoſes.

But to conſider farther the importance of diffuſing religious principles through the various ranks of ſociety. Nothing can be eaſier than to operate upon the human paſſions, more eſpecially upon the paſſion of fear. It admits of all poſſible gradations, from doubt to poſitive madneſs. This is the inſtrument upon which every religion has played, more or leſs. Upon the groſsly wicked, the Chriſtian has operated more powerfully than any other religion,

> For no falſehood can endure
> Touch of celeſtial temper.

It has ſtolen in upon the ſolitary moments of the ruffian, and diſconcerted plans that might have involved the fate of ages and of empires. In the more virtuous heart, it has ſublimed the ſame paſſion into love and gratitude to God and a paternal ſolicitude for the welfare of his fellow-creatures.

When

When it is once determined that the Chriſtian religion is a ſovereign balm to heal the wounds of ſociety; the application of the remedy ſeems to be the only remaining difficulty. The operation appears to have been conducted in ſome ſuch method as the following. A decent reſpect, a becoming deference is paid to the feelings of virtuous men in every age. Perſons of this deſcription have, for the moſt part, enjoyed a conſiderable ſhare of influence in every department of ſociety. In our own country, at leaſt, the admirers and profeſſors of virtue have generally been the admirers and profeſſors of religion; and it may reaſonably be preſumed, that, in points of conſcience, religious men will receive, with implicit faith, the rules and authority of holy writ. But holy writ recommends, in the ſtrongeſt terms, the duty of obedience to governors; and though it defines not the limits and extent of this duty, yet, if it be conſidered, that no leſs a tyrant than Nero, was the governor to whom the Apoſtle enjoined obedience, and if the rule of conduct, followed and pointed out by the Apoſtle, is to be our precedent, even in a very remote degree, there cannot be much danger of overleaping the bounds preſcribed for the duty of obedience. Hence the profeſſors of Chriſtianity, and they are by no means few in this our day and nation, from conſcience

and from principle, will endure a government with many grievances and faults. They will never ſo much as deſire to apply a deſperate remedy, except in deſperate caſes, and even then with the utmoſt precaution, and with a ſhock, that will leaſt endanger the baſis of public welfare. They will, from choice, oppoſe that ſpirit of innovation, that rage for novelty which pervades and maddens the inferior ranks of ſociety, and which would become totally irreſiſtible, were it not for the awe, excited by the Chriſtian religion. By every thinking mind, no ſpirit ſhould be eſteemed more dangerous than this. For amidſt ſo many changes, amidſt ſo many infancies of circumſtances, amidſt the rapid circulation of ſo ſeducing an object as political power, it muſt unavoidably happen that new and unqualified men will frequently acquire the aſcendency. And late experience pleads with too much eloquence to be reſiſted, that no obſervation was ever more fully verified than the following; "that the evil of a moral and almoſt phyſical inaptitude of the man to the function, muſt be the greateſt we can conceive to happen in the management of human affairs."* It was from a want of ſome ſuch ſteady principle as the Chriſtian religion, of ſome ſuch conſcientious ſpirit as it excites, that there were ſo many innovations

* Burke's Ref.

tions and their attendant conſequences in the governments of the ancients. It is from a want of a more extenſive diffuſion of the ſame principle, that a conſiderable part of the globe is at preſent ſo deformed with acts of premeditated carnage and deſtruction.

But Chriſtianity has been productive of another advantage. To overlook this advantage would be highly inexcuſable and ungrateful. It has ſecured the means of a religious education in ſome degree or other to every order of ſociety. To enumerate the ſolid benefits ariſing from this ſource would be needleſs indeed, ſo many memorable inſtances being daily preſented to our view. So long as this mode of inſtruction is rigorouſly purſued, there can be little danger of our reaching that ultimate and dreadful point of exaltation, much leſs of reverting to a ſtate of barbariſm. But if ever we become ſo ſupremely fooliſh, ſo ſuperlatively abandoned, as to caſt from us, this laſt beſt gift of heaven, all the horrors and miſeries hitherto experienced by mankind, will be mercy to that day *. The error and its conſequences however will remain with us and with us ſolely.

 From

* If, in the moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium from the hot ſpirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now ſo furiouſly boiling, we ſhould uncover our nakedneſs,

From the whole then, I think, we may ſafely conclude, that the Chriſtian religion has guided, to their proper objects, the intellectual, moral and ſocial powers of man, with a certainty infinitely ſuperior to every other inſtitution. Were not this the caſe, it had been ſingular enough, eſpecially when we conſider its nature and deſign. It would have been ſtrange had revelation unfolded to man, even as a temporal being, a curſe inſtead of a bleſſing; had it diſcovered to us the will of a Deity delighting in the miſery of his creatures. But revealed religion informs us, "that God ſo loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoſoever believeth in him, ſhould not periſh but have everlaſting life." It has diſcloſed an invaluable truth, to conſole the virtuous and to awe the wicked, in that important leſſon. "The dead ſhall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear ſhall live;—all that are in their graves ſhall come forth; they that have done good unto the reſurrection

nakedneſs by throwing off that Chriſtian religion which has hitherto been our boaſt and comfort, and one great ſource of civilization amongſt us, and among many other nations, we are apprehenſive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that ſome uncouth, pernicious and degrading ſuperſtition, might take place of it. *Burke's Ref.* It refreſhes one to quote an authority of this kind; this is that awful warning voice, "exalted, not into wild raving, but into the ſanctified phrenſy of prophecy and inſpiration."

tion of life and they that have done evil to the reſurrection of damnation." Chriſtianity has revealed to us the purpoſes of the Almighty with regard to man ; and to talk of the ſufficiency of the light of nature, is to talk with levity and at random. For he who has obſerved upon the real doubts, the ſincere opinions and, in conſequence of theſe opinions, the various conduct of the wiſeſt of men among the heathens, if he knows any thing, muſt know the inſufficiency of ſo imperfect a guide.

But if we conſider, that human reaſon, fallible as it is, has been ſo frequently abuſed; that it is the nature of ſophiſtry to diſtort every thing, that it can deduce the moſt plauſible conſequences, from the moſt dangerous and abſurd hypotheſes, that it has little choice in its food and leſs delicacy in its choice : we ſhall perceive an additional reaſon for the abſolute neceſſity of a plain and direct revelation of the divine will ; a revelation to guide us to that ideal happineſs and perfection, which it is the lot of humanity to contemplate but never to attain.

THE END.

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